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The Harvest Issue

On the cover: Discover new and interesting sages; wind down with a seed care ritual; cook with antioxidant-rich berries; stay healthy with flavorful herbs; lower blood pressure; and more.

Seed Storage Guide: Seed Care and Storage Tips

It's time for a little end-of-summer seed cleaning. Follow these easy winter-storage tips and suggestions to get the most out of your future spring garden.
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Stealth Health: Flavorful Herbs that Heal

Stock your medicine cabinet with herbs from your very own backyard to ease digestion, boost memory, keep your heart healthy and much more.
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Beautiful Berries for Your Health

From the sweet strawberry to the tart cranberry, these six antioxidant-rich berries aren't just a tasty treat. Stay healthy with great-tasting recipes.
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Delicious Recipes with Unusual Sages

Salvia officinalis is more than just another pretty herb. Discover its unique cultivars to make gardening and cooking with sage even more fun.
Page 32

Cover photo: Howard Lee Puckett

Honey for Healthy Skin

Celebrate busy, buzzing pollinators with homemade beauty treatments. Also, learn how to attract bees to your garden with our helpful tips.
Page 18

Lower Your Blood Pressure

Almost 73 million Americans have high blood pressure; our herbal expert explains how to correct hypertension with the help of four effective herbs.
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ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

www.herbcompanion.com/onlineexclusive

Visit the above link to find extras that didn't fit in this issue. We call it online-exclusive content, and you can find it all on our website. Plus, we're always online blogging and researching. Connect with us in the comments of our blogs, on our Facebook or Twitter pages, or e-mail *editor@herbcompanion.com*.

Discover:

- Visual guides for berries and sages
- Bonus recipes
- More about fibromyalgia
- How-to cooking videos
- Exciting giveaways

THE Herb COMPANION

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 6

September 2010

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The Herb Companion Volume 22, Number 6 (ISSN 1040-581X) is published bimonthly by Ogden Publications Inc., 1503 SW 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609, (785) 274-4300. USPS #004-086. Periodical postage paid at Topeka, KS 66609, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post International Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 40601019.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Herb Companion*, Subscriptions, 1503 SW 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609.
SUBSCRIPTIONS: Send all subscriptions and renewals to *The Herb Companion*, Subscriptions, 1503 SW 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609. For subscription inquiries in the U.S. call (800) 456-6018. Outside the U.S., call (785) 274-4300. Subscription rate is $24/year in the U.S. Foreign and Canadian subscribers please pay $34/year for surface delivery or $54/year for Air Mail. U.S. Funds only. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years.

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Taylor Cole Miller

Heal Thyself

As we prepare each new issue of *The Herb Companion*, I often feel great fondness for each of the articles we've selected (or I wouldn't want to share them with you!) and rarely pick a favorite. I have to admit, though, that I am especially excited about Dr. Gina Mohammed's article on the therapeutic value of culinary herbs (Page 24) and am once again reminded of how truly amazing herbs are.

Though not every herb is lovely, if it's beauty you seek, many herbs provide aesthetics galore. Honestly, you'd have to have a heart of stone not to be moved by those lovely fronds of fennel or dill waving lazily in the breeze, or the tidy tumble of thyme trailing down a garden wall. Perhaps it's the combination of beauty and aroma that appeals to you more, and certainly, herbs can fit that bill. Simply brushing past the basil and lemon balm just outside my front door sets my olfactory receptors dancing a little jig and always makes me want to bury my nose in those friendly leaves for more, more, more.

Take those lively, aromatic plants into the kitchen and the senses are in for even more of a treat. A very large part of where I get to play in life is in my kitchen, seeing if a little more tarragon will make this sauce pop or if the combination of dill and basil has any possibility (not so much, as it turns out). I chop and chiffonade and grate and pulverize my way into happy oblivion, shutting out the world for at least a little while as I turn my smallish kitchen into a one-woman herbal emporium and provide, with at least some frequency, dishes that make my friends say, "Mmmm." I live for moments of Mmmm, those times when life's deliciousness overwhelms any other consideration, and comfort and enjoyment temporarily rule.

And as if moments of Mmmm weren't enough, now Dr. Mohammed tells us those very plants can help our digestion; protect our bodies from bad microbes; mop up free radicals; and help us remember where we put our car keys. The paradigm is different from the solutions we see advertised on late-night television: we don't just pop a few leaves of basil and feel better fast. But naturally incorporating herbs such as turmeric, garlic, sage, parsley, basil, oregano and thyme as part of our daily nutrition promotes side-effect-free health for the long haul, which is the path I choose and hope you do, too. For those times we need contemporary medicine, the drugstore is a boon. But if I can reduce my health-care costs and increase my overall wellness by eating turmeric? With garlic? Holy moly, sign me up.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we loved putting it together for you. Just wait until you get a gander of those gorgeous recipe photos. Garden snips and paring knives at the ready …

Onward,

K.C.

K.C. Compton, Editor in Chief

Raise Funds with Us

We recently heard from Lisa D. LaRue in Wichita, Kansas, reporting on The Herb Society of South Central Kansas. The society took advantage of our fundraising offer and sold 76 subscriptions to *The Herb Companion* to earn a bit of money for their club. If you belong to a garden club, a chapter of the Herb Society of America, or another herb-related organization and would like to participate in our fundraising program, please contact us for details by e-mailing *editor@herbcompanion.com*.

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Dear *Herb Companion,*

Paula Woody sent in this great picture of her daughter, Kyra.

Be a Guest Blogger

In the July 2010 issue, Editor in Chief K.C. Compton mentioned loving to see pictures and stories about our readers' gardens. Kathy Amen sent us some lovely photos of her outdoor inspirations (above). Now Kathy is blogging for us; see more of her photos at *www.herbcompanion.com/kathyamen.*

FIVE MINUTES BEFORE this picture was taken, Kyra said, "Mommy, I got up before anyone else!" She loves the pretty, colorful pictures of all the herbs. She said to tell you her favorite herbs are lamb's ear (because she likes that it is soft to feel), mint (she loves to pick leaves when she's out playing and eat them), and catnip because Mommy sprays her to keep "skeeters" off of her.

Paula & Kyra (future herbalist) Woody
McLeansville, North Carolina

I HAVE RECENTLY been introduced to *The Herb Companion*. What a wonderfully informative and colorful magazine. In your March 2009 issue, you have a great article, "The Humble Cabbage." There was no mention of a cabbage tree. I was recently at a community seed fair in my hometown in British Columbia and there were cabbage trees for sale. Have you ever heard of this plant?

Norma Bomske
Campbell River, Canada

I have heard of and seen the cabbage tree. This amazing plant is in the Cordyline family instead of the cabbage family so the green, edible leaves don't resemble cabbage in appearance, which is probably why it wasn't included in the article. —Kris Wetherbee

MY SAGE LEAVES are getting yellowish. Please help!

Mario Dell'Oro
Milan, Italy

This could be due to any number of things. You could have poor soil; your sage may have been over-watered; recently sprayed weed killer may have even drifted onto its leaves. Determine which sage variety you are growing and compare its required growing conditions to yours. (To discover more sage varieties, see Page 32.) —Eds.

I WAS READING your April 2009 article about growing lavender. I live up in the mountains in Colorado and just cleared a long embankment abutting my house. It will be too costly to buy plants so I was thinking about planting lavender from seed. Which type of lavender should I plant from seed? Which provider should I order from?

Stephanie
via e-mail

Lavender can be grown from seed, but it can be tricky at first. Stick with it, though, because drought-, heat- and wind-tolerant lavender is perfect for your area. Good drainage is key; gravel mulch can also be beneficial to retain heat. Local providers usually carry varieties well suited to area growing conditions. Paulino Gardens in Denver recommends growing English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*); it is hardy and will overwinter well. The cultivar "Lady" is best because it grows true.—Eds

JEREMY RANKIN FROM Wisconsin wrote in to ask about the reference to sheep sorrel as a common name for *Oxalis stricta* in our July 2010 article "Native Plants for your Table." Jeremy is correct that sheep sorrel is also a common name (as is red sorrel) for *Rumex acetosella*. But sheep sorrel and wood sorrel, among others, are accepted common names for *O. stricta*, according to various sources. —Eds.

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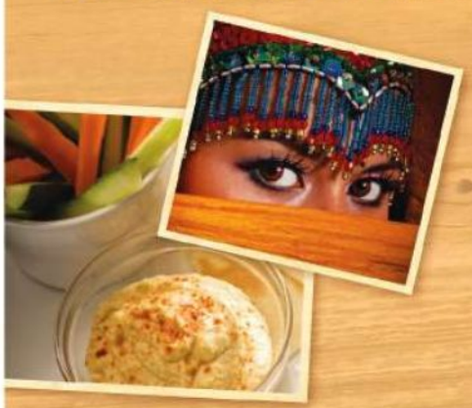

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Preserve Flavor

Harvest Basil Like a Pro

Basil is easy to grow, but keeping that fresh spicy-sweet flavor intact is not so easy … unless you know a few vital tips and shortcuts.

• Frequent harvesting is key to luscious, flavorful leaves. Start by pinching the stemless and succulent cluster of new leaves at the top of a shoot above the leaf nodes (the joint in the stem where leaves grow) when plants reach 6 to 8 inches tall. At 12 to 18 inches tall, cut the plant back by two-thirds every three to four weeks. This will result in a multi-stemmed, bushy plant full of harvestable leaves.

• When storing basil, forego the refrigerator as the cold can cause leaves to blacken. Instead, keep basil fresh like you would cut flowers—in a glass of water on the kitchen counter. Change the water in your basil bouquet daily and you can keep the fresh flavor going for up to 10 days.

• Blessed with a bounty of basil? Freeze the excess in ice cube trays. Finely chop leaves (or puree in a blender) and mix with water, broth or olive oil. Then fill ice cube trays with the paste and freeze. Once the cubes are frozen, you can pop them out and transfer the basil pops into a zip-top freezer bag for easy storage. Drop a frozen cube or two into simmering soups and stews or to bring a touch of summer flavor to winter stir-fries and sautés. —Kris Wetherbee

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Boost Local Beekeepers

Did you know that only 30 percent of the honey consumed in the United States is local? Support local beekeepers by celebrating National Honey Bee Awareness Day, which takes place August 21. Last year, 16 states and 42 bee associations honored the second annual event with various educational events. One favored event was a honey trail hosted by apiaries around Pennsylvania. Bee lovers followed the trail to taste various honeys their local beekeepers produced.

Visit *www.nhbad.com* to get involved; check out *A Short History of the HoneyBee* (Timber Press, 2009) to learn more about the eternal chase for honey. Also, turn to Page 19 to learn how you can attract pollinators to your herb garden. —Gina DeBacker

Cucumber Lime Salsa

This recipe tastes great over chicken seasoned with cilantro, or may be used as a dip. For a twist on the recipe, add avocado chunks to the mix. Excerpted with permission from The Herb Garden Gourmet *(Sourcebooks, 2009) by Tim Haas and Jan Beane. To buy the book, see Page 51.* SERVES 4

- 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded and minced
- 4 spring onions, thinly sliced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lime juice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon grated lime peel
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1 Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Refrigerate overnight, then stir again and serve.

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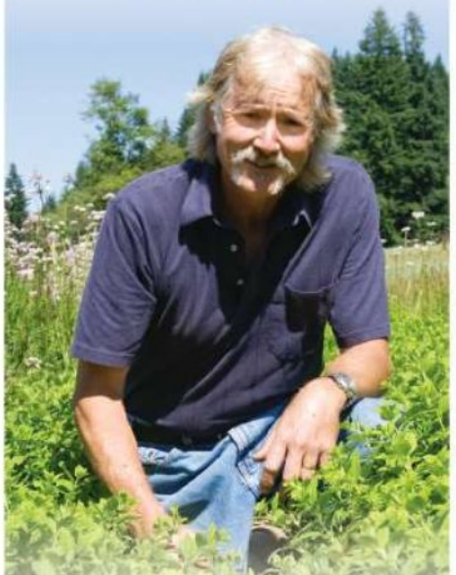

"Every time I think about my grandchildren, I remember why I'm still doing this. You see, about 16 years ago, I began saving seeds from my 45-acre certified organic herb farm. Each year, we would spend days gathering them. Some we used for planting the following year, but most we either saved or gave away. Over time, as the threat of genetically modified (GMO) seeds increased, the importance of each **Non**-GMO seed became clear. That's when I took things to a new level and hired a botanist to catalog each plant's true genus and species. Now, future generations will get to enjoy the healing power of herbs grown in their true and highest quality form – a tradition that's been passed down for centuries."
– Randy Buresh, Co-founder of Oregon's Wild Harvest

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Stop the Pain of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia (a syndrome characterized by chronic pain and fatigue) often is associated with chronic fatigue syndrome. The precise causes of each remain a mystery, though immune suppression seems to be a factor.

Jody's Case

Jody was a 32-year-old student working hard to finish her bachelor's degree in fine arts. She came into the office for the same reason as many patients dealing with chronic fatigue or fibromyalgia: Her doctor had run out of ideas. The doctor had prescribed many of the usual drugs, including the tricyclic antidepressant amitriptyline; the muscle relaxant cyclobenzaprine; the SSRI antidepressant Celexa; the sleeping aid Ambien; the anticonvulsant clonazepam; the antidepressant trazodone; and the opioid pain medication Ultram.

Celexa had worked for a few months, but Jody developed anxiety and her sleep became even worse than usual. Ultram helped with the pain for about a year, but again, she eventually developed severe anxiety and had to stop. "I buy Tylenol by the case, but have to switch off with other pain medications I buy without a prescription," she said. "They work for a few hours sometimes, especially after a hot bath."

As we discussed her health history, Jody mentioned several factors strongly associated with immune suppression—10 years on antibiotics for acne during her childhood and several infections during her late teens and early 20s, including a severe bout of mononucleosis, associated with the common Epstein-Barr virus. It is perhaps the most common viral agent associated with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue.

Internal Imbalances

A look at Jody's tongue revealed a number of imbalances in her spleen system, according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The spleen system encompasses most notably the digestive organs and immune function. A working diagnosis for her general condition was "spleen qi deficiency," and secondarily, "kidney qi deficiency" and "heart fire." Her tongue was so swollen it had formed around her teeth, creating indentations, and the tip

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was bright red. Her tongue was shaking, another sign of qi deficiency.

Not every fibromyalgia patient I've seen has had a spleen imbalance, but from what I've seen and the research I've done, this is by far the most common underlying pattern. If digestive symptoms occur along with fatigue and myalgia, brain fog and some of the other common symptoms, this is a reliable sign of spleen qi deficiency with immune suppression.

In Jody's case, the kidney system imbalance and heart (associated with the nervous system in TCM) imbalance seemed to relate to a strong history of overwork, stress and her past use of stimulants like coffee, tea and soft drinks. The caffeine from these beverages eventually wears the body down, and it may take years to reverse the pattern. Not everybody with fibromyalgia has such a history, but at least one major stressor usually has been present. Jody's problems were not uncommon, but they appeared to be severe and long-standing.

The Dietary Approach

For spleen deficiency, it helps to avoid raw fruits and vegetables, except during the hottest months. Jody's diet plan included baked squashes, light stir-fries with green vegetables and always included some protein—fish, chicken, tofu or tempeh. A varied whole-foods diet, low in sugar and moderate in processed foods, is best.

A Personalized Herbal Program

Herbal spleen qi tonics are an important foundation that are best taken in tea form, using dried teas (powdered extracts) in capsules and tablets. Tinctures are not as effective for long-term tonic effects.

Make sure to buy extracts, not simple powders. Take 2 to 4 grams of the extract, either single mushrooms, or a blend of two to three mushrooms at most.

Jody's Herbal Formulas

Spleen qi tonic formula with immune support

- Burdock root (gobo)—available fresh from many markets, or dried;
- Ginseng root (for energy)—red is more warming, white more neutral;
- Eleuthero (for counteracting stress)—tincture taken separately as needed;
- Orange peel (organic)—used to harmonize the herbs;
- Licorice (about 1/10 of the formula by weight)—if desired, for flavor.

Pain formula

- California poppy—helps with insomnia, anxiety, some analgesic effects;
- Corydalis—the main pain herb I use, but has some toxicity at high doses; best to consult with your health-care provider before starting;
- White willow bark—contains natural salicylates; new studies show good pain-relieving effects for arthritis.

Jody's Response

After four weeks of a fairly intensive regimen, Jody began to respond. Over the long run, we both saw the effort was worthwhile. Jody still has her ups and downs, but has learned new ways to adjust and support her health when she needs to.
—Christopher Hobbs, L.Ac., A.H.G.

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[Featured Garden]

More than Meets the Eye

Next to Audio-Reader, the radio reading service for the blind at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, volunteers developed a sensory garden for the visually impaired. In this multifaceted garden, colorful lavenders, thymes and roses take center stage. Gentle paths, fountains and sculptures add to the typical garden beauty—but the garden appeals to all senses, so those who can't see its brilliant bursts of color and architectural elements can experience the garden, too. Everyone is encouraged to explore it with their fingers, ears, noses and tongues. Visitors smell cinnamon carnations, hear the wind whisper through red cedars, touch feathery yarrow and taste all sorts of mint.

"It's especially nice after a good rain because everything is so fragrant; you feel the happiness of the plants," says Susan Tabor, assistant coordinator of volunteers for Audio-Reader. Susan, who is blind, enjoys the heady scents of basil, peppermint and lavender; the touch of peony petals; listening to bubbling fountains and the songs of the birds. "A garden like this calls forth spirituality," she says. "You feel wonderment as you experience its various cycles."

The garden originated as a small bed planted in 1996: Now it has grown into a

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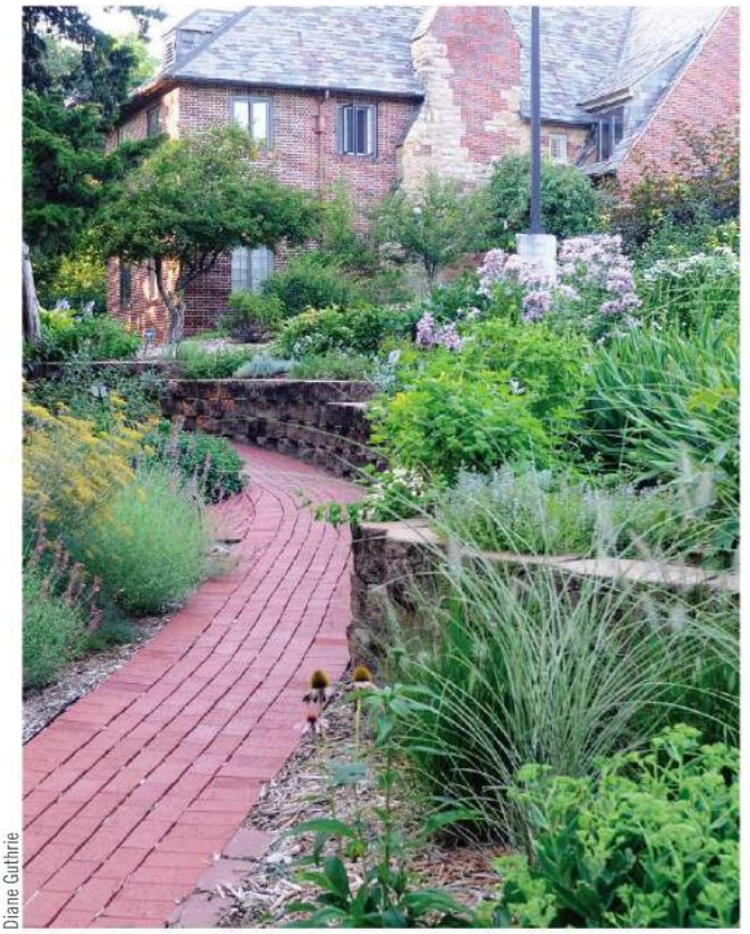

Diane Guthrie

A garden for all senses goes beyond visual beauty to embrace tactile, fragrant, delicious plants and soothing sounds.

waist-level terraced garden that allows visitors in wheelchairs to savor a fragrant array of plants as they roll along winding brick paths. Specimens are labeled in both Braille and print. Benches and a gazebo offer spots to stop and soak it all in.

Anyone can enrich their surroundings with a sensory garden. Such a garden might be as simple as a pot filled with sensuous herbs or as grand as an entire yard. As you sketch your own plans, consider which senses you want to emphasize. You might want a garden, or series of gardens, dedicated to a single sense. Or, as at Audio-Reader, you might mingle all five senses together.

In selecting plants, consider color, texture and form. Smell, touch, and taste the contenders and consider how they might sound. Remember, this is a hands-on garden so avoid pesticides and poisonous plants such as monkshood and foxglove.

In design, think in terms of similarities and differences. Pair plants that play off one another in both color and fragrance, such as *Artemisia stelleriana* 'Silver Brocade' with *Rosa rugosa* 'Frau Dagmar Hastrup'. Elsewhere, mingle plants with contrasting color and form, say mixed waxy-leafed *Begonia semperflorens* with gold-edged lemon thyme (*Thymus* ×*citriodorus* 'Archers Gold').

Raised beds or large pots add dimension and allow visitors to touch plants without stooping. Water features, pathways, sculptures, chimes and strategic seating enhance the calm. Fountains are particularly nice: "There's something very soothing about water," Susan says. While all gardens have their charm, there's nothing like a sensory garden to calm the soul.

Your Own Sensory Garden

Sight. Seek color in flowers, fruits, foliage and bark. Warm colors (reds, oranges and yellows) add cheer; cool colors (blues, greens, purples) add a sense of calm. Look for ruffled, fuzzy or lace-textured plants. Entice butterflies and birds with purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) and butterfly bush (*Buddleia*). For late-season interest, try Autumn Snakeroot (*Actaea simplex*), with spires of fragrant white flowers, and Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*).

Sound. Go for ornamental grasses that sway in the wind and fragrant lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*). Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*), an annual, has rattling seedpods; moving water attracts songbirds; and in autumn, leaves crunch underfoot.

Scent. English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) perfumes the air; 'Hidcote' is one of the most fragrant cultivars. Basils and oreganos add strong savory scents. Put *Pelargonium* 'Citronella' on your "must-have" list along with other scented geraniums. Consider lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), lavender cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*) and creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum* 'Pink Chintz'), a nicely scented groundcover.

Touch. Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) begs you to feel its piney needles. Add variety with velvety lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*), spiky globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*), soft gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*), fleshy hens and chicks (*Sempervivum tectorum*). Bark, seedpods and water features add tactile interest, too.

Taste. Chocolate mint (*Mentha* ×*piperita* 'Chocolate') is like a peppermint patty without the calories! Consider berries, peppermint, orange mint, parsley, sweetleaf (*Stevia rebaudiana*) and edible flowers such as nasturtiums and violas. —Carol Crupper

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Living the Fairy Tale

Fantasizing about wee winged folk is a timeless rite of passage. You can help the children in your life on their backyard fairy journey with a few of nature's baubles.

Children's fairy play seems to be universal, from the dappled woods of Sweden to the hidden forests of Monhegan Island, Maine, where children and grown-ups create magical fairy houses using only nature's toy chest for materials. When given a chance to play outdoors, children inevitably invite the fairies to be a part of their lives. I watched in awe as my granddaughter Ilyahna laid out a perfect fairy landscape under the pine tree. Her stockpile of leaves, flower petals, twigs, moss, acorns, shells, and pods were fashioned into beds, rugs, tiny chairs, and dishes fit for even the most discriminating of fairies.

The strange thing is that she did this before I had the chance to teach her about making a fairy garden. I had been looking forward to initiating her into the ways of the fairy-folk, but like most children, she was privy to all that knowledge without needing any help from a grown-up. She instinctively reached for some of the beautiful and natural objects scattered throughout the yard and began the quiet and joyful work of creating magic.

Make a Fairy House and Garden

You can make fairies a part of your grandchild's life by providing some areas for play and a ready supply of natural objects. Before your grandchild arrives for a visit, set the scene for a fairy landscape. Find a shaded area of your yard (under big bushes or trees) and clear a circular space for your grandchild's hidden fairy garden. Smooth the soil and outline the circle with pinecones, acorns, twigs, shells or rocks. Plant the circle with a collection of small bulbs or coral bells, a plant the fairies love. Fill in the circle with a cushion of soft mosses or mulch. Be on the lookout for wonderful shells, pebbles, rocks, pods, cones, twigs, lichen, mosses and leaves—anything that would work for outfitting a fairy house and garden. Around the time of a child's visit, nestle your natural finds throughout the yard or garden and near the cleared fairy space. When your grandchild arrives, walk outside together and discover the magical circle. Stroll through the yard and find some of the natural objects you've seeded there. As you gather them, talk about what they look like and what they might become in a fairy garden or house.

—Excerpted from *Toad Cottages & Shooting Stars.* © 2009 by Sharon Lovejoy. Used by permission of Workman Publishing. All Rights Reserved. To purchase, turn to Page 51.

Contributing Editor Kris Wetherbee grows herbs in western Oregon. Christopher Hobbs' case studies are gleaned from his 30 years of studying and practicing herbalism. Gina DeBacker is editorial assistant at The Herb Companion. *Freelance writer Carol Crupper gardens and enjoys the many public gardens in Lawrence, Kansas.*

Editor's Pick

Exfoliating Walnut & Wood Apple Face Scrub by **Himalaya Herbal Healthcare**, $7.99

In lieu of plastic exfoliating beads (an ingredient that is harmful to sea creatures), finely ground and polished granules of walnut, wood apple and nutmeg gently exfoliate dead skin cells. Holy basil and sweet marjoram also infuse this great-smelling scrub, which is free of parabens, phthalates and synthetic fragrances. *www.himalayausa.com*

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Get Gorgeous with Honey for Healthy Skin

BY JANICE COX

Bees have the secret for glowing skin. Try these five honeybee-inspired recipes.

Bumblebees just might be nature's best cosmetologists. They produce beeswax and honey, some of the most valuable natural beauty ingredients—and ones that we have not been able to duplicate in the laboratory. Both are key skin- and hair-care ingredients that have been used since ancient times. Today, the use of bee-based ingredients is more popular than ever—they can be found in every major cosmetic company's line of products, from soaps to facial moisturizers.

Pure, natural honey and beeswax are produced by hardworking bees. Honey contains potassium, phosphorus and zinc, and there are more than 300 varieties produced worldwide. Bees may travel more than 55,000 miles and visit 2 million flowers to produce a single pound of honey. Bees also are natural environmental filters—they die if they come into contact with toxins, so pollutants don't make it into their hives. Toxins such as industrial emissions, car exhaust and agricultural

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chemicals all pose a threat to honeybee populations today. It is important for us to provide safe, healthy gardens and environments for bees to thrive and multiply in.

Honey is a natural humectant. A humectant has the ability to attract and retain moisture. This is important for healthy skin and hair because it helps maintain softness and flexibility. It also is a powerful antioxidant; the darker the shade of honey, the more antioxidant potential. Antioxidants play a role in protecting the skin from

Bee-Friendly Gardening

- **Plant where bees will visit.** This is probably the most important. You can have colorful flowers of all shapes and sizes, but the bees need to find them. Bees love sunny spots that are sheltered from the wind.
- **Don't use pesticides.** Most pesticides are not selective and can kill off beneficial bugs along with other pests. If you must, use the least-toxic formula and follow the directions carefully.
- **Plant native.** Native plants are far more attractive to native bees than exotic flowers. Natives also are usually well-adapted for your climate and growing conditions.
- **Choose colorful flowers.** Bees have good color vision. To help them find flowers (and thus the nectar and pollen), plant bright colors. Blue, purple, white and yellow all attract bees to your garden.
- **Plant in groups.** Clusters of flowers are most attractive. This is why bees flock to your flowering containers and pots.
- **Plant flowers of different shapes and sizes.** There are 4,000 different species of bees in North America, and they are all different sizes. Providing a range of flower sizes means all bee species can find nectar and pollen using their tiny legs and tongues.
- **Have a diversity of plants flowering all season.** Having a range of flowering plants means you can support a wider range of bees flying by your garden at different times in the season.

Try These

Organic Raw Honey by Wholesome Sweeteners, $9.99. *www.wholesomesweeteners.com*

Filtered Domestic Cosmetic Grade Beeswax Bars by GloryBee Foods, $0.95. *www.glorybee.com*

Lip balm by Honeybee Gardens, $2.99. *www.honeybeegardens.com*

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damage. Soothe cuts, scrapes and burns by dabbing a bit of honey directly onto your skin. It is a good choice for those with troubled or acne-prone skin because it helps heal your complexion and, because it also has antimicrobial properties, helps kill the growth of certain bacteria on the skin's surface.

Apitherapy is the term used for treatments that involve honey- and bee-based products. Many spas offer treatments that enhance physical stamina, calm the mind, and rejuvenate the skin using honey, beeswax and bee pollen. You can create your own simple, yet effective treatments and products at home. Here are some easy recipes to try.

Janice Cox and her daughter, Lauren Cox, co-authored EcoBeauty: Scrubs, Rubs, Masks, and Bath Bombs for You and Your Friends *(Ten Speed Press, 2009). Find it at* www.herbcompanion.com/shopping.

Soothing Acne Zapper

If you have a minor acne flare-up, this simple treatment will clear it up.

Mix together 1/2 cup warm water and 1/4 teaspoon salt; stir well until salt dissolves. Apply a cotton ball soaked in the solution directly to blemish and maintain pressure with cotton ball for several minutes. Then, use a cotton swab to dab pure honey on blemish. Leave honey on for 10 minutes and rinse well with warm water.

Honey also makes an excellent weekly facial mask; simply spread on your face and leave on for 20 minutes.

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[The Recipes]

Honey Cleanser

Honey has been used as a skin beautifier since ancient Egyptian times. For dry skin types, substitute whole milk for the lemon juice.

1 tablespoon honey
2 tablespoons finely ground almonds
½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice

1 Mix together all ingredients until well-mixed.
2 To use: Massage gently into your face and neck and rinse well with warm water. Pat skin dry and moisturize well.

Beeswax Lip Balm

Beeswax is a classic lipstick ingredient that dates back to the early 1900s when commercial lipsticks were first introduced.

¼ cup grated beeswax
3 tablespoons vegetable shortening
2 tablespoons cocoa butter
1 tablespoon light oil, such as almond, sunflower or canola

1 Mix together all ingredients in a heat-resistant container.
2 Heat the mixture gently in the microwave or on the stovetop until just melted. Stir well until you have a pale golden liquid.
3 Pour melted mixture into lipstick tubes or a shallow oiled pan. Allow mixture to cool completely. If using a pan, unmold and cut the hardened mixture into small sticks. Wrap each stick in aluminum foil.

Soft-Skin Soak

This is a wonderful bath for dry, sensitive skin and is gentle enough for children. You can use any variety of honey in this recipe.

1 cup water
½ cup honey
½ cup mild liquid soap

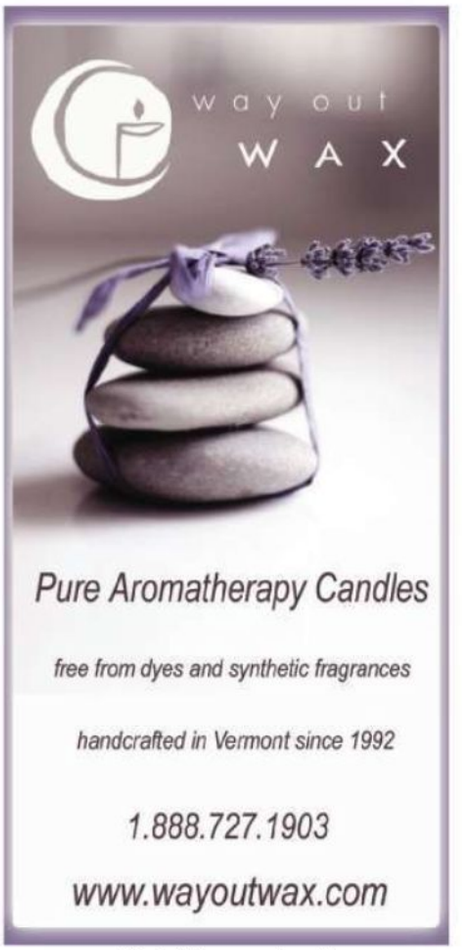
1 Mix together all ingredients and pour into a clean bottle with a tight-fitting lid.
2 To use: Gently shake to remix and pour 1/4 cup into the bath under the running water. Soak for 15 to 20 minutes.

Smooth-Skin Treatment

After a day spent outdoors in the garden, your hands and feet may need a bit of conditioning.

1 tablespoon honey
1 tablespoon sunflower oil
¼ teaspoon fresh lemon juice

1 Mix together all ingredients.
2 To use: Massage into hands, elbows, heels and feet—anywhere skin feels dry. Leave on for 10 minutes, then rinse well with warm water and pat dry.



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Lower Your Blood Pressure

Expert advice on which herbs can help correct hypertension.

BY KARTA PURKH SINGH KHALSA

Q *Can herbs help keep my blood pressure in a healthy range? Why is regulating blood pressure important, anyway?*

A When your heart pumps, each life-giving squeeze sends blood coursing through your arteries, which pipe that blood to every corner of your body. The force of blood pushing against those arterial walls is, simply put, your blood pressure. Normal pressure is less than 120/80, but if it climbs above 150/90 (stage 2 hypertension), you're getting into rough territory. The wall of the artery can be weakened by the constant high blood pressure, and eventually can tear and cause complications, such as a stroke.

About 73 million adults in the United States—one in three people older than 20—have high blood pressure. Upwards of 90 percent of those with chronic high blood pressure have no obvious damage or disease; the American Heart Association conjectures that 30 percent are unaware of their condition, prompting its "silent killer" moniker. Over time, high blood pressure is likely to damage every one of your organs.

It's important to normalize your blood pressure, but rarely would it ever need to be lowered instantly. Just don't ignore it. Herbs can be an effective way to lower blood pressure over a period of one to two months, and then to maintain healthy blood pressure.

4 Effective Herbs

Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.) is the European jack-of-all-trades herb for safe and effective treatment of heart and circulatory disorders, due to its potent bioflavonoid-like complexes. Traditionally, the berries were used, but scientists have found active ingredients in other parts of the plant. Studies have shown that hawthorn extracts lower blood pressure. A recent British study successfully used hawthorn to lower blood pressure in diabetics.

A common dose is 80 to 300 mg of standardized extract with total bioflavonoid content (often 2.2 percent) or oligomeric procyanidins (usually 18.75 percent), two to three times per day. You also can use a tincture of 4 to 5 ml three times daily, or at least 4 to 5 grams per day in capsules. Allow at least two to four weeks for the herb to take effect. It is a long-term therapy, so the effectiveness of hawthorn

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Silent killer: 73 million Americans have high blood pressure, and 30 percent may be unaware of their condition.

might still be increasing even after one to two months.

Though it is rather new to us here, **arjuna bark (*Terminalia arjuna*)** is famous in Ayurvedic medicine, where the thick, red bark is the most widely used herbal cardiac medicine. Modern clinicians in the United States are using arjuna for coronary artery disease, heart failure, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Several Indian studies over the last few years have shown that arjuna, in animals and in humans, reduces total cholesterol and increases HDL ("good" cholesterol). One study showed that this herb was as effective an antioxidant as vitamin E, and that it reduced cholesterol in the human subjects quite substantially. Considering its benefit for cholesterol, it is not surprising that it lowers blood pressure; many cases of high blood pressure in the United States are caused by cholesterol accumulation in the arteries. Use 1 to 3 grams of dried arjuna bark per day, in capsules.

Maybe high blood pressure can be reversed with simple spaghetti sauce. According to recent research in Australia and the United States, **garlic *(Allium sativum)*** seems to reduce blood pressure by about 5 to 10 percent. Every bit helps in offsetting the chronic damage from hypertension.

One German study looked at 47 subjects with mild hypertension. For 12 weeks, the patients received a daily dose of 600 mg of garlic powder, standardized to 1.3 percent alliin, which reduced the maximum pressure on the artery (systolic blood pressure) by 6 percent and the minimum pressure (during the slack space between beats or diastolic pressure) by 9 percent. A 2009 Russian study found garlic to be effective at reducing blood pressure in men with mild and moderate arterial hypertension. Numerous other experiments showed approximately the same results.

Garlic powder extract standardized to contain 1.3 percent alliin is typically given in a dosage of 900 mg daily. Higher doses of garlic can reduce blood pressure more markedly. You can include more garlic in your diet or use a higher dose as a supplement.

Green tea (*Camellia sinensis*) is a panacea for the cardiovascular system. It can reduce total cholesterol, LDL ("bad" cholesterol) and triglycerides, and improve the ratio of LDL cholesterol to HDL cholesterol. Norwegian research confirms that people who drink the beverage have lower blood pressure. EGCG, a main active ingredient, reduces blood clotting about as much as aspirin or *Ginkgo biloba* extract, reducing the chance of stroke. A 2009 scientific review by faculty at The University of the West Indies found that green tea likely reduces heart attack and stroke. Most of the research supports a dose of about three cups per day (providing 240 to 320 mg of polyphenols). Standardized extracts of polyphenols, particularly EGCG, are available.

Herbalist and author Karta Purkh Singh Khalsa is Senior Research Scientist and Chief Medical Formulator for Yogi Tea.

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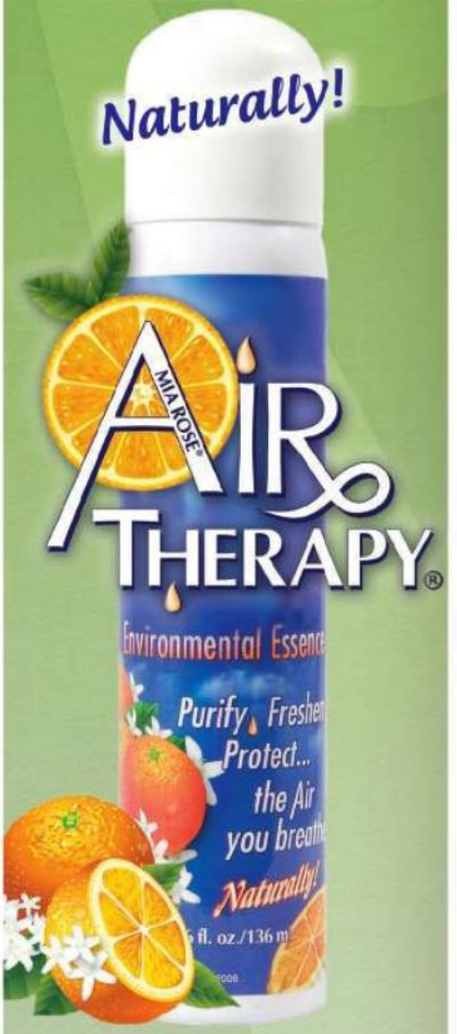

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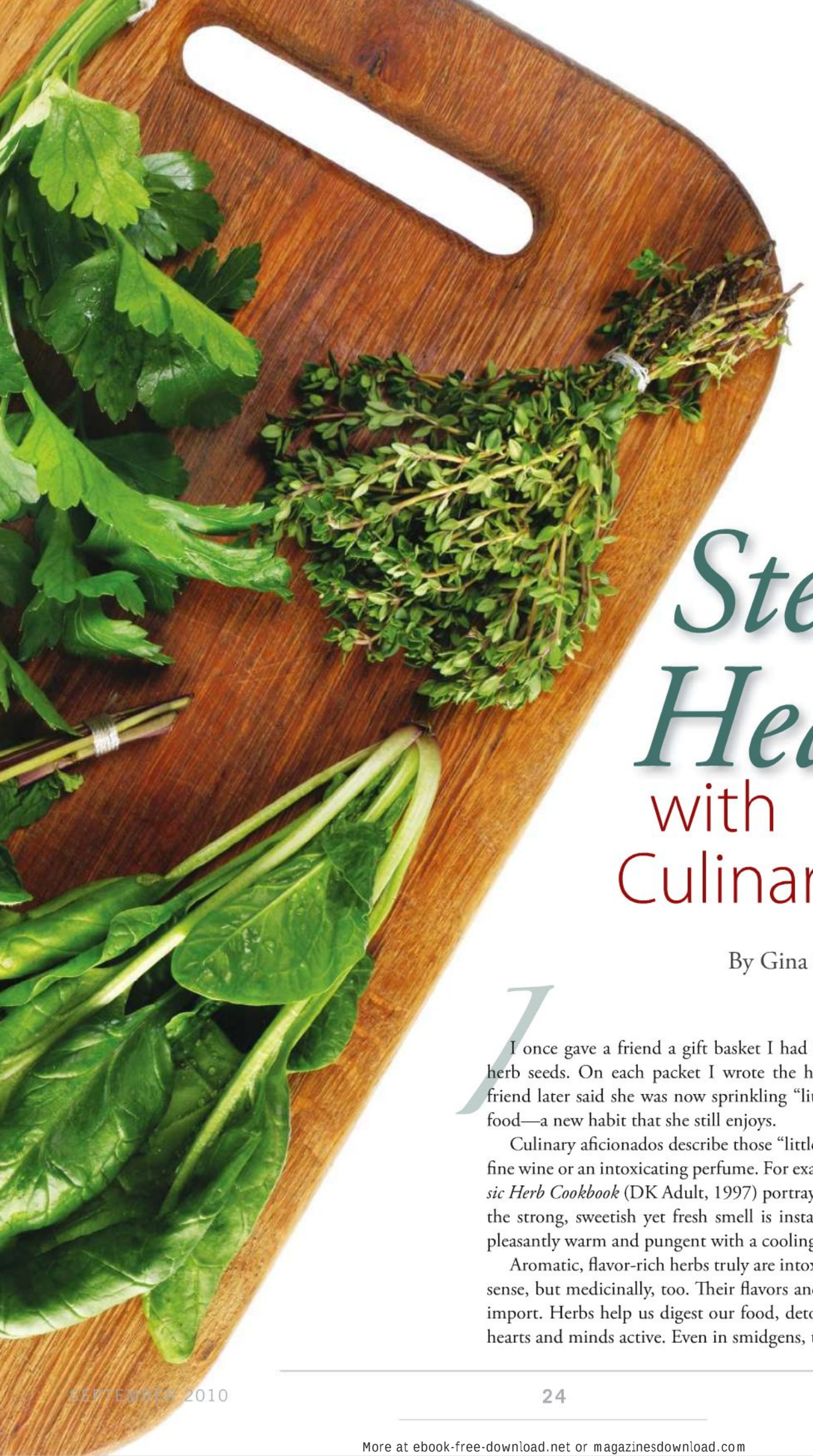

Stealth Health with Culinary Herbs

By Gina Mohammed

I once gave a friend a gift basket I had filled with packets of culinary herb seeds. On each packet I wrote the herb's therapeutic benefits. My friend later said she was now sprinkling "little green things" on all of her food—a new habit that she still enjoys.

Culinary aficionados describe those "little green things" as they would a fine wine or an intoxicating perfume. For example, Jill Norman in *The Classic Herb Cookbook* (DK Adult, 1997) portrays mints as "…highly aromatic, the strong, sweetish yet fresh smell is instantly recognizable. The taste is pleasantly warm and pungent with a cooling aftertaste."

Aromatic, flavor-rich herbs truly are intoxicating—not just in a culinary sense, but medicinally, too. Their flavors and aromas are rich in medicinal import. Herbs help us digest our food, detoxify our bodies, and keep our hearts and minds active. Even in smidgens, they make their presence felt.

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Discover the everyday healing power of flavorful culinary herbs. Add herbs and let your diet do double duty by eating well to feed your appetite and your health.

Digestive Herbs

Most culinary herbs help digestion. A few are outstanding.

Mint (*Mentha* spp.). Spearmints, peppermints and other mints are all respected for their digestive benefits. In the early Christian church, peppermint was so valued it was accepted as payment of tithes. Well-studied for its digestive effects, peppermint contains several carminatives—menthol, anethole and carvone—that settle the stomach and relieve gas. Peppermint is also a gentle "bitter herb." Bitter herbs are those that aid digestion by stimulating bile production.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*). Caraway seeds contain carvone and other compounds that relax the smooth muscles of the digestive tract. Seed extracts used in certain commercial herbal digestive aids (sometimes along with peppermint oil) have been found to improve chronic indigestion. Enjoy a small dish of caraway seeds with cheese, or sprinkle them into soups or stews.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). The gingerols and shogaols in ginger are antispasmodics, soothing the stomach and stimulating peristalsis. Ginger encourages gastric emptying. It also relieves constipation, and may ease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome. Gingerols degrade with cooking, processing and storage, so enjoy it fresh or minimally cooked.

Other helpful digestives are dill, basil, rosemary, fennel, turmeric and cinnamon.

Antimicrobial Herbs

Herbs that deter harmful bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms keep foods from spoiling and help protect our bodies from such microbes.

Thyme (*Thymus* spp.). During World War I, thymol from thyme was a famous battlefield antiseptic. Modern disinfectants subsequently usurped its place. But even in modern kitchens, you couldn't have a finer herbal weapon. Thyme combats a wide range of toxic bacteria and fungi, including those associated with food poisoning. Try marinating meats in thyme-laced seasonings for a few hours before cooking.

Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*). Cilantro contains a volatile constituent called dodecenal, which is antibiotic against salmonella. The bactericidal action apparently defends against any stage of growth of the salmonella bacteria. Use the lemon-scented leaves fresh, as the aroma, flavor and medicinal action decline with storage. Coriander seeds are also effective.

Other good antimicrobials are garlic, lemon balm, oregano and cinnamon.

Clean kitchen tip: Tea tree is also antimicrobial. Make a natural all-purpose cleaner for your kitchen by combining 2 tablespoons borax with 1/4 cup lemon juice and 2 cups hot water in a spray bottle. Cap and shake well to dissolve the mineral. Add 20 drops tea tree essential oil and shake again to disperse the oil.

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Antioxidant Herbs

Free radical damage to cells and tissues may contribute to many aging-related ailments, such as cataracts, macular degeneration, dementia, atherosclerosis and arthritis. Antioxidants scavenge free radicals. In foods, they also help prevent spoilage.

Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*). There is no better antioxidant herb than oregano. The USDA's Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) list, which rates the antioxidant strength of many foods, ranks oregano highest among herbs. Only the spices cinnamon and cloves beat out oregano. Oregano's potency resides in its flavonoids and phenolic acids, used by the plant to protect itself from light damage. Greek oregano, the most aromatic subspecies (*O. vulgare* ssp. *hirtum*), was used in the tests.

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*). Antioxidant action in purple basils comes mainly from anthocyanins, and in green basil from other flavonoids. Purple basils are better antioxidants, especially 'Dark Opal', which rivals Greek oregano for antioxidant action. Basil is most effective fresh. If you must cook it, add it at the end and sprinkle extra as a garnish.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*). Don't toss a parsley garnish—it contains the antioxidants apiol, myristicin, vitamin C, lutein and zeaxanthin. Both flat- and curly-leaved types appear to have similar nutritional profiles, and parsley is most healthful uncooked.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). Rosemary loves sunshine and poor, dry soils—conditions that encourage development of antioxidant phenolics, including carnosic acid. Carnosic acid may protect brain cells as it can penetrate the blood-brain barrier. It is an intriguing potential therapeutic agent for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Unlike more delicate herbs, rosemary retains its healthy properties when cooked.

Other antioxidants: thyme, turmeric, sage, cloves, cinnamon.

Memory-Boosting Herbs

Some herbs help our brains function more effectively.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis, S. lavandulifolia*, etc.). Sage is considered a brain stimulant. It is a good antioxidant, containing—like rosemary—carnosic acid as well as rosmarinic acid. It is also anti-inflammatory, which can help allay degenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer's. Sage extracts have been shown to inhibit the enzyme acetylcholinesterase, implicated in Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's drugs target this enzyme. Sage varieties with variegated leaves are the mildest-flavored and may be less potent medicinally.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). Turmeric is vying for super-herb status. A recent paper in the *Annals of the Indian Academy of Neurology* reviewed its benefits against Alzheimer's. The herb supports macrophage cells in clearing out plaques in the brains of Alzheimer's sufferers; discourages chronic nerve-cell inflammation; neutralizes free radicals; and binds toxic heavy metals so they don't congregate in the brain. Low amounts taken over a long time are more effective than high doses.

Other good memory herbs: garlic, ginger, rosemary.

Herb or spice—which is it?

Culinary herbs are the leaves or flowers of plants, whereas spices come from barks, seeds or roots. Some plants supply both—the coriander plant, for example, which yields coriander seeds and cilantro leaves; and dill, its seeds and foliage both well-liked. Some seasonings, like the underground rhizomes ginger and turmeric, are accepted as herb or spice.

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Heart-Healthy Herbs

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*). The seeds of fenugreek—which are used in some Indian curries—contain sapogenins that help the body excrete cholesterol. Fenugreek helps lower triglycerides and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (aka LDL or "bad" cholesterol). It reduces blood sugar, too. Fenugreek also contains coumarin (a blood thinner), so it should be used with caution if you are taking anticoagulants.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*). For years, garlic was thought to benefit cardiovascular health by reducing cholesterol and blood pressure, but thorough reviews in the last few years indicate that's not necessarily the case. Instead, it appears that garlic may be most helpful in preventing blood clots. Small amounts (a clove or two daily) of fresh garlic over a long period can be helpful. Obtain your doctor's approval if you are taking blood-thinning medications.

Other heart-friendly herbs include onion, chives, juniper berries and ginger.

A little will do

Because many herbs are potent, small amounts used regularly may be safest. Anything beyond culinary amounts may be too strong for certain individuals, such as women who are pregnant or nursing; individuals with some health conditions (e.g., liver disease); or those taking medications such as blood thinners and blood sugar-lowering drugs.

Gina Mohammed, Ph.D., is a plant physiologist who researches medicinal and other specialty uses of plants. She lives in Ontario, Canada. Visit her at www.pmtech.ca.

[The Recipes]

Herb Butter

Herb butters made with savory herbs can be spread onto bread, meats or vegetables, and used in sauces and sautés. Peppermint or other sweet-herb butters can be served with pancakes, waffles, warm muffins and other desserts.

4 to 6 tablespoons fresh herb leaves (e.g., basil, chives, dill, fennel, mint, parsley, tarragon, cilantro, thyme, sage)
10 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 Chop herbs to release the leaf oils, then blend herbs into the butter with a fork.
2 Pack the butter into a roll of waxed paper and refrigerate for up to 24 hours to distribute flavors and firm up.
3 Slice the roll into disks or shave into curls to serve, or use the herb butter for cooking. Try adding additional seasonings such as paprika, cayenne, ground pepper, garlic or shallot.

Herb Oil

Herb oils are excellent in salads, for sautés, on bread—or simply poured over sliced hard-boiled eggs. Suitable herbs include basil, bay, dill, fennel, garlic, lemongrass, mint, oregano, rosemary, savory and thyme. Dried chilies or peppercorns and the seeds of dill, fennel, cumin or coriander may be added, as well.

3 to 4 tablespoons (or 4 to 6 sprigs) of fresh herbs
2 cups olive oil

1 Put the herbs into a sterilized jar, set aside.
2 Heat oil until just warm. Slowly pour warm oil over herbs.
3 Once cool, strain into a sterilized bottle, cover and label. Herb oils will keep for a week in the refrigerator.

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Shrimp with Coconut Milk, Chile and Curry Leaf

SERVES 4

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
½ teaspoon black or brown mustard seeds
½ teaspoon fenugreek seeds
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 teaspoons garlic, finely minced
2 teaspoons fresh ginger, finely minced
1 to 2 fresh green chiles, chopped and seeded
1 tablespoon ground coriander seeds
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
Generous 1 cup canned low-fat coconut milk
1 pound jumbo shrimp, cooked and peeled (thawed and drained if frozen)
1 tablespoon tamarind juice or juice of ½ lime
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
10 to 12 fresh or dried curry leaves

1 Heat 3 tablespoons of the oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. When hot but not smoking, add mustard seeds, followed by fenugreek seeds and onion. Cook, stirring frequently, for 5 to 6 minutes until the onion is soft, but not brown. Add garlic, ginger and chiles and cook, stirring frequently, for an additional 5 to 6 minutes, until the onion is a light golden color.
2 Add coriander, turmeric and chili powder and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add salt and coconut milk, followed by shrimp and tamarind juice. Bring to a slow simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 to 4 minutes.
3 Meanwhile, heat remaining 1 tablespoon of oil in a very small saucepan over medium heat. Add pepper and curry leaves and cook for 20 to 25 seconds, then fold the aromatic oil into the shrimp mixture. Remove shrimp from the heat and serve immediately.

Carrot and Ginger Energizer

SERVES 2

Generous 1 cup carrot juice
4 tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 ounce fresh parsley
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
6 ice cubes
½ cup water
Chopped fresh parsley for garnish

1 Place carrot juice, tomatoes and lemon juice into a blender and process gently until combined.
2 Add parsley, ginger and ice cubes. Process until well combined, then pour in the water and process until smooth.
3 To serve, pour the mixture into glasses and garnish with the chopped fresh parsley.

Salsa Verde

SERVES 6

¾ cup fresh parsley leaves
⅓ cup mixed fresh herbs (e.g., basil, chives, cilantro, mint)
1 garlic clove, chopped
6 green olives, pitted
1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained
2 anchovy fillets, rinsed and chopped
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 teaspoons lemon juice
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Put all ingredients, except the oil, salt and pepper, into a food processor and blend to a smooth paste.
2 Gradually blend in the oil to form a sauce, then add salt and pepper to taste.
3 Serve as a dip with fresh bread and raw or cooked vegetables.

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Herb-Roasted Potatoes

SERVES 4

3 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons fresh rosemary leaves, chopped
2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves
1 teaspoon fresh sage leaves, chopped
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon dry mustard
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 pounds fingerling or new potatoes, halved
Fresh thyme sprigs, for garnish

1 Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2 Whisk together olive oil and next 6 ingredients in a large bowl.
3 Cut larger potatoes in half; add potatoes to oil mixture and toss gently until potatoes are evenly coated. Place in an aluminum foil-lined jelly roll pan.
4 Bake 35 to 40 minutes, or until potatoes are tender, stirring after 20 minutes.

Howard Lee Puckett

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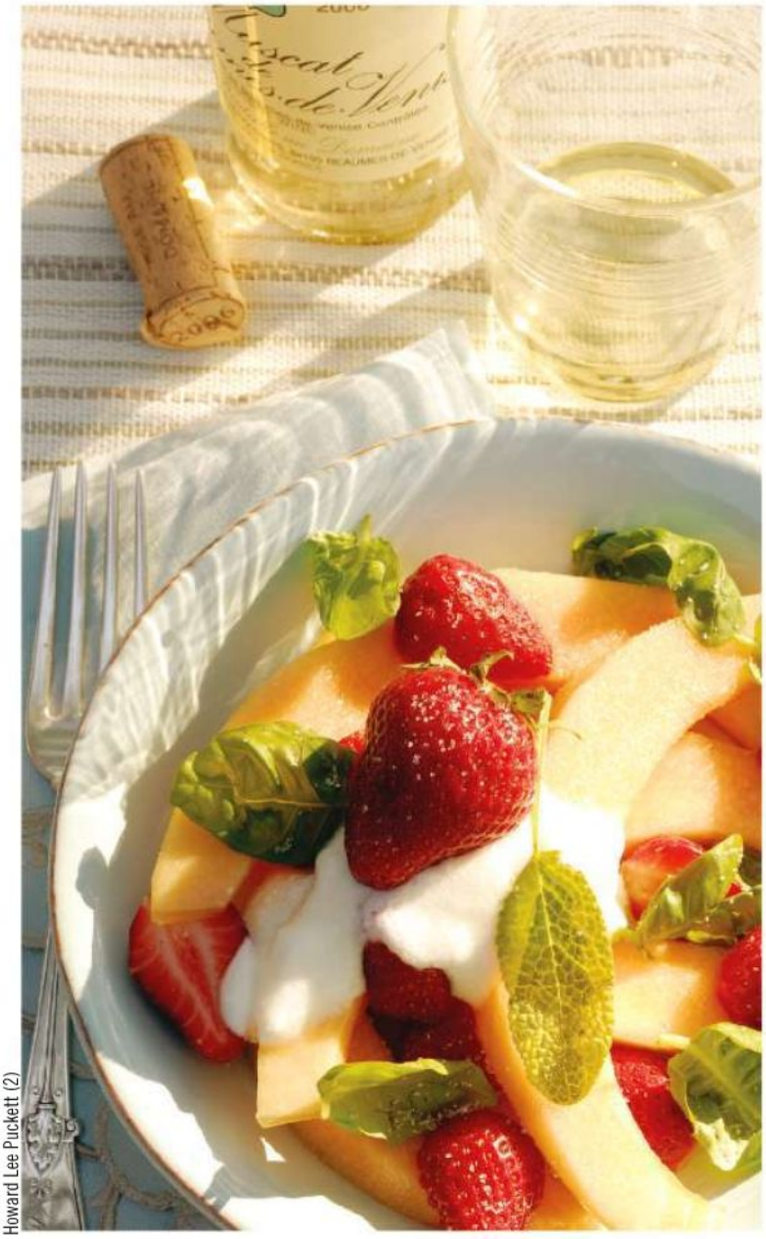

Howard Lee Puckett (2)

Strawberry, Cantaloupe and Basil Salad

SERVES 4

- **1 cantaloupe**
- **1 pint strawberries, hulled and halved**
- **¾ cup dessert wine**
- **Fresh basil leaves**

1 Cut cantaloupe in half; seed, slice and peel. Place in a large bowl. Add strawberries and toss gently.
2 Pour wine over fruit; cover and chill 30 minutes.
3 Arrange on a salad plate; top with basil leaves.

Turmeric Yogurt Soup

SERVES 4 TO 6

- **⅓ cup garbanzo bean flour**
- **1 teaspoon ground turmeric**
- **¼ teaspoon chili powder**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **1¾ cups plain low-fat yogurt**
- **2 tablespoons peanut oil**
- **3 cups water**
- **Chile Pepper Garnish (recipe below), fresh parsley sprigs, for garnish**

1 Whisk together garbanzo bean flour, turmeric, chili powder and salt in a large bowl. Whisk in yogurt until no lumps remain.
2 Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan over medium-high heat. Whisk in yogurt mixture and then water. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking constantly. Reduce the heat to low and cook, whisking constantly 8 minutes, or until soup thickens slightly and no longer has a "raw" taste.
3 Ladle into warmed soup bowls and top with Chile Pepper Garnish (recipe below).

Chile Pepper Garnish

- **1½ teaspoons peanut oil**
- **¾ teaspoon cumin seeds**
- **½ teaspoon black or brown mustard seeds**
- **½ teaspoon crushed fenugreek seeds**
- **4 to 6 fresh red chili peppers**

1 Heat oil in a small skillet. Add the cumin, mustard and fenugreek seeds and cook, stirring constantly until seeds start to jump and crackle. Add chili peppers and remove skillet from heat. Stir for about 30 seconds, or until peppers blister. (If the peppers are fresh, they might burst and "jump," so stand back.)

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[Salvia officinalis]

Sage

By Caleb Melchior

The genus *Salvia* contains a staggering range of species suitable for every garden use under the sun—and in the shade. But for cooking, none can rival common garden sage (*Salvia officinalis*) and its cultivars. Sage has long been valued for its contributions to the cook's palette of flavors. Its robust piney aroma and earthy flavor complement many ingredients. Sage is also an attractive garden plant, particularly in its fancy-leaved forms. Plus, it prospers under a wide range of conditions and adds a striking bold texture to mixed plantings.

What's the Difference Between Types of Sage?

S. officinalis varies widely in the size and shape of its leaves. Sharp-eyed herbalists have spotted numerous selections with unusual leaves, taken cuttings and propagated the resulting plants so that we can all enjoy them. 'Berggarten' is a vigorous clone with large, broad leaves and a strong flavor. It's probably the most productive variety for home herb gardens. 'Curly' was selected by Alice Doyle of Log House Plants in Cottage Grove, Oregon, from a wild population in Crete. Its wrinkled and puckered leaves give the plant a highly textured appearance. 'Holt's Mammoth' has large leaves, although they're often not as large as those of 'Berggarten'. Dwarf forms of *S. officinalis* circulate under a variety of names, including 'Compacta', 'Dwarf', 'Minima', 'Nana' and 'Robert Grim'. In general, these plants will reach 8 to 12 inches in height and width, making them significantly smaller than the species. Use them in containers or in-ground plantings where space is tight. Strains chosen for heavy production and good performance under greenhouse conditions are sometimes available, but these are usually of little interest to home gardeners.

Numerous forms have been selected for colored foliage. 'Icterina' has strong golden-green variegation surrounding a cucumber-green splash. It's hearty and vigorous in growth. 'Purpurascens' ('Purpurea') is another strong grower, this time with dark leaves that have a dusky sheen of purple, green and indigo. 'Rainbow' is a variegated version of 'Purpurascens'. Its purple leaves have splotches of cream and rose. 'Tricolor' is the more common multicolored form, with splashes of lilac, cream and green. It's slow-growing and resents crowding, wet and cold.

Besides these varieties with unusual leaf colors, clones with more typical variegation of white, cream or pale green have recently become available. 'La Crema' is a variegated sport from 'Berggarten'. Its leaves have a thick cream border. It's vigorous and showy, making it an excellent choice for planting in the ground or in containers. 'Variegated Woodcote' has light green leaves with a darker splotch in the center. 'White Edge' has an attractive pattern of cream splashes on typical soft green leaves.

'Berggarten', 'Icterina' and 'Purpurascens' are the easiest to find of the fancy-leaved sages. Look for them at your favorite local nursery. The other forms are rarer—check herb society sales and online herb specialists.

At Right: David Cavagnaro; Above: Rob Cardillo

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GROWING INFO

Light: Full sun
Height: 18 to 24 inches
Width: 24 to 36 inches
Bloom time: Late spring, although valued most for its evergreen foliage.
Soil: Well-drained, tolerant of a wide range of soil types.

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Plant Key

1. Common garden sage
2. 'Purpurea'
3. 'Berggarten'
4. 'Icterina'
5. 'Tricolor'
6. 'Nana'

Garden Design with Sage

Salvia officinalis is admirably ornamental in its typical grey-green form. It can be trained into sculpted mounds for a controlled appearance, or left to sprawl in irregular clumps. The leaves have a lightly pebbled surface, which makes them look fuzzy. This soft texture combined with a muted flower color (pastel shades of blue and lilac-pink) gives the plants a soft appearance. Garden visitors will want to stroke them. If they do, they'll be pleased at the plants' robust fragrance.

Varieties with unusual leaf sizes, shapes and colors have even more garden potential. 'Berggarten' and 'Mammoth', with their broader leaves, have a blockier presence and make a great foil to frilly-leaved companions. The leaves of 'Curly' have wavy edges that lend a strong texture, making it stand out in mixed plantings. It has the character to make an excellent solo pot specimen. The dwarf forms' tighter growth habit makes them well-suited to plantings in which forms must be strongly defined, such as parterres and knot gardens.

The colored-leaf selections have strong visual impact. Gold and green 'Icterina' complements strong blues—it would make an excellent companion for bush delphiniums. The purple-washed leaves of 'Purpurascens' are sensational with soft yellows. Try it with Oenothera 'Shimmer', a new evening primrose from Colorado with lemon-colored flowers and silvery leaves. 'La Crema' and 'White Edge' would look lovely as an edging around cream-colored roses. Their strong aroma might also help repel insects.

S. officinalis and its selections are useful in containers. Make sure they don't stay wet, or they'll rot. Good air circulation is essential, as well—they dislike being crowded. 'Icterina' and 'Purpurascens' are often used in mixed edible containers. They look good through both cold and warm seasons. 'Tricolor' looks especially fine when grown as a specimen in a terracotta pot—growing solo ensures that it won't be overwhelmed by over-vigorous companions.

Susan A. Roth

A Cook's Guide to Sage

Unlike the green sawdust Aunt Mabel used to sprinkle over her turkey, there's more to sage's flavor profile than dusty and musty. Fresh sage is deep, robust and earthy. To balance these base notes, fresh sage also has a lively zing that you won't find in any powder.

This lively—almost lemony—flavor component is most obvious in spring, while the leaves are still very young. Strengthen this taste by combining sage with mint. You can also keep sage from becoming drab by combining it with lemon. As summer approaches and sage's flavor becomes more robust, try combining it with a multitude of different herbs. Its earthiness adds depth to herbal blends. Autumn cooking is highly supportive of sage. Its haunting aroma can perfume rich meats and carb-rich dishes. Use it to flavor slow-braised pork or starchy cubes of roasted squash.

Sage can easily become overwhelming, so start with a small amount and slowly increase the quantity to taste. The leaves can be rough and chewy, particularly later in the year, so mince them finely. If you want the flavor of sage without its presence in the final result, add sprigs of it to whatever you're cooking and remove them before serving.

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Rob Cardillo

Tips for Growing Sage

Salvia officinalis is an easygoing plant with few demands. But, if you want it to thrive, give it what it needs. At least six hours of full sun per day are essential. Soil should be well-drained, but not constantly dry. Avoid over-rich soil, or you'll have lush growth at the expense of flavor. That's it.

Typical green-leaved *S. officinalis* is winter-hardy in Zones 5 to 9. The colored-leaf forms are weaker. Plant them high and dry for best results. Even under the best of conditions, they're not reliably winter-hardy in areas north of Zone 7. Treat them as annuals and be happily surprised if they return for an encore performance. Don't mulch them with anything moist and composty—they'll rot. Also, make sure that they're not crowded—most (particularly 'Tricolor') need impeccable air circulation and resent being jostled by their neighbors.

Sage is evergreen in most of its hardiness range, although its leaves will be damaged by extended periods of extreme cold. Wait until hard frosts pass in spring before trimming your sage. Most salvias—including *S. officinalis*—can be severely damaged by late frosts if they're cut back early and start into growth while it's still cold.

Once the weather warms in spring, sages will put forth a new crop of leaves. These will have the best flavor of the entire year. Their flavor intensifies until flowering starts, usually in late spring. After flowering, sage's leaves toughen. To stimulate new growth, cut the plant back by one-third. Fertilize lightly with an organic fertilizer, such as fish emulsion, after pruning.

Sage can be grown from seed, but the easiest way to increase your stock is by taking cuttings. Cuttings are the only way to maintain specific clones (you won't get variegated seedlings from seeds taken from a variegated plant). Since sage plants often become woody and start to die out in spots as they age, it's a good idea to take cuttings and start new plants every two or three years—especially because young plants are more vigorous and produce better yields than older plants.

Taking cuttings is as simple as it sounds: cut off a three-inch shoot of *S. officinalis*, strip off the lower leaves; stick the cutting into sterile growing medium; keep moist and warm for the next few weeks; and wait for roots and new growth to appear. Once your plants have rooted, prepare them for life outdoors by leaving them in a cold frame or sheltered porch for a few days to moderate the temperature change between inside and out. Then look forward to cooking with your beautiful sage.

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[The Recipes]

Howard Lee Puckett (2)

Toasted Brie and Sage Sandwich

MAKES 1 SANDWICH

Cover Recipe

2 white bread slices
2 tablespoons butter, softened
1 to 2 tablespoons finely minced fresh sage
1 to 2 ounces Brie, roughly sliced
Fresh sage sprigs, for garnish

1 Spread one side of both bread slices of with butter. Sprinkle with sage.
2 Arrange Brie slices on one buttered bread slice. Place remaining bread slice, buttered side down, on top of Brie.
3 Spread butter on both sides of sandwich. Cook sandwich in a pre-heated panini press 2 to 3 minutes or until golden brown.
4 Cut in half and serve immediately.

Oyster Mushroom Sauté with Sage

SERVES 2

1 clamshell oyster mushrooms
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon sage, chopped fine
Coarse salt and black pepper

1 Clean mushrooms by wiping with a damp cloth. Slice.
2 In a medium sauté pan, melt the butter. When butter has melted, toss in mushrooms. Sauté for 5 minutes, or until mushrooms brown lightly at the edges.
3 Cover and cook for another 5 minutes. Mushrooms should now be soft and ready to eat. Stir in the sage. Salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Salmon with Lemon and Sage

SERVES 4

Large salmon fillet, skin-on
Extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 small lemons
Handful fresh sage

1 Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Grease a large roasting pan. Lay salmon in pan, skin side up.
2 Drizzle with olive oil, then season heavily with salt and pepper. Slice lemons into thin rounds and tear sage leaves off their stems. Scatter lemon rounds and sage leaves over salmon.
3 Roast 20 to 25 minutes, until salmon is opaque throughout, and serve.

Carrots in Sage and Rosemary Broth

SERVES 4

3 bunches baby carrots with tops (about 1¼ pounds)
1 (14-ounce) can chicken broth
2 large sprigs fresh sage
1 large sprig fresh rosemary
10 mixed peppercorns
Pinch coarse salt
Rosemary sprigs, sage sprigs and coarse salt, for garnish

1 Scrape carrots and cut off tops, leaving a ¾-inch stem.
2 Combine carrots and next 5 ingredients in a Dutch oven. Bring to a boil over high heat; reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes, or until carrots are crisp-tender.
3 Serve carrots with a ladle of broth.

Caleb Melchior studies landscape architecture at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. When not working in the design studio, he writes about food and works in the garden.

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Visit *www.herbcompanion.com/sage* for a plant photo guide and more sage recipes.

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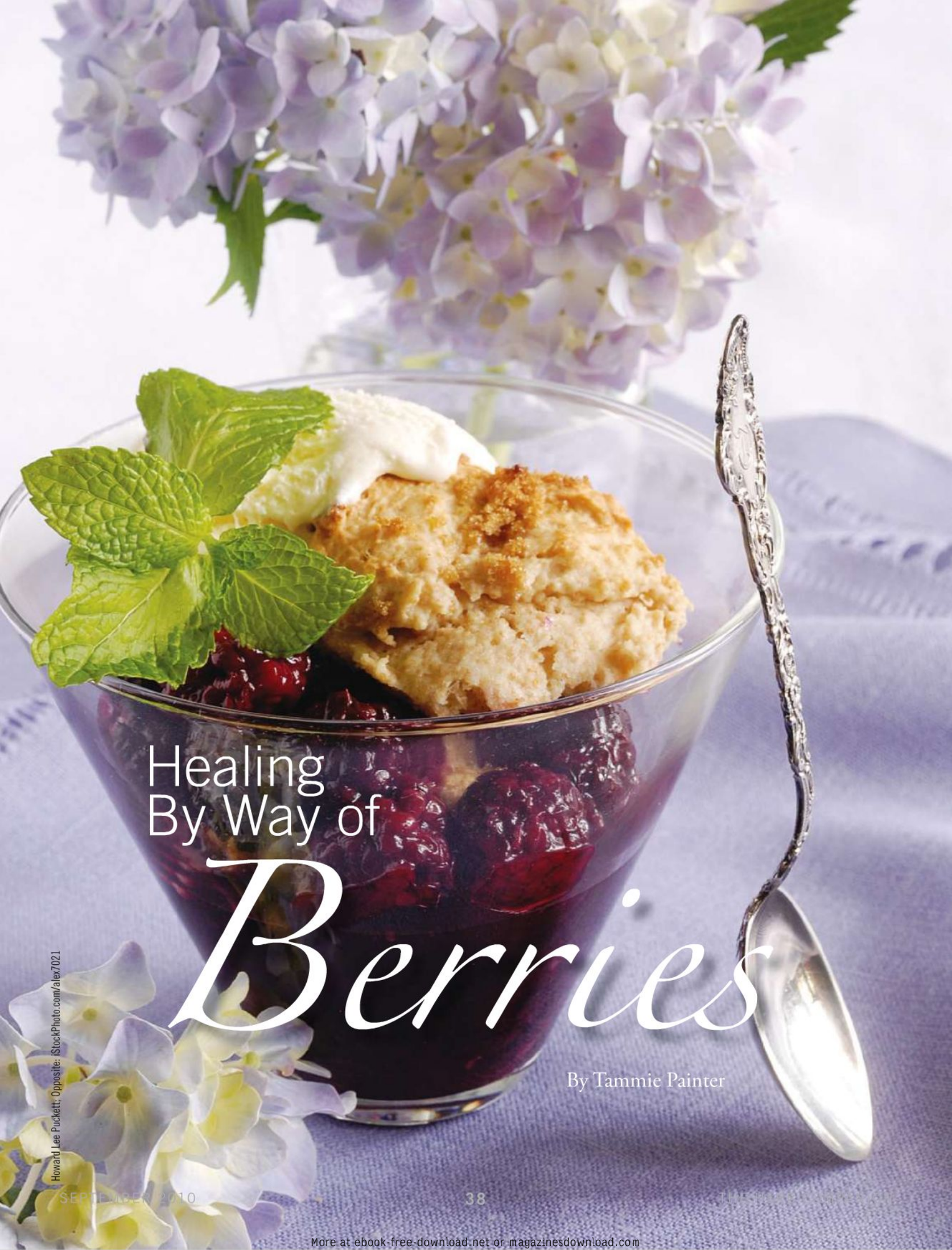

Healing By Way of *Berries*

By Tammie Painter

Howard Lee Puckett; Opposite: iStockPhoto.com/alex7021

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Summer-sweet berries pack a healing punch of antioxidant-rich flavor, so whip up these three seasonal dishes for your best health.

When a person speaks of the healing power of plants, herbs often come to mind first—the roots of echinacea, the leaves of mint or the flowers of chamomile. However, until recently berries were overlooked as important contributors to natural health. Is this because until recently the properties of berries hadn't been studied? Or maybe it's just that we can't believe anything that tastes so sweet and delicious can be good for us. Whatever our prejudice may be, berries are packed full of amazingly healthful phytochemicals and flavonoids and shouldn't be overlooked.

All berries contain an array of vitamins and minerals, plus dietary fiber, but each berry's unique mix of chemicals gives it a different health benefit. Generally, the darker the berry, the stronger its health benefits since the properties that make up the berry's color are what also help our bodies fight disease.

The best berries for flavor and health benefits are those that have been shipped the least. Growing your own or purchasing from your local berry farm are the best choices for you, your palate and the environment. If you have a little space in your garden, it is easy to find a berry variety or two that will grow in your climate. If you can't grow your own or live in an area where berry farms are few and far between, frozen and dried berries have been found to contain nearly the same antioxidant levels as freshly picked (and more than what is found in berries that have been shipped fresh over long distances).

Blueberries

Currently the star of the berry world, the blueberry is a powerhouse of phytochemicals. Studies by Tufts University have found that older rats fed blueberries daily significantly improved cognitive and circulatory function when tested against rats that ate no blueberries. In addition to helping your brain and heart, blueberries also contain lutein, an important carotenoid for maintaining eye health. Blueberries are related to many native temperate plants of the northwest and grow well in the backyards of the area, but don't tolerate the heat of southern climates very well.

Strawberries

What says "summer" like a fresh strawberry? Easy to grow in most any yard and also found in the wild, the smell and taste of a ripe strawberry can't be beat. Among commonly grown berries, the strawberry contains the highest vitamin C content (100 mg per cup), which is important for immune function and overall health. They also pack a healthy dose of magnesium and fiber. Studies show that strawberries have a similar benefit to blueberries for improving brain function.

Raspberries and Blackberries

These delicate late-summer berries are the basis for tasty treats like freezer jam and cobblers. They also have been found to be

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These three indulgent recipes (at right) are great for introducing antioxidant-rich berries to your dessert.

among the strongest berries for attacking free radicals in the body. The phytochemical mix in the raspberry and blackberry (also known as the black raspberry) works in our bodies as an antioxidant, gobbling up free radicals and fighting cancer. The numerous varieties of this cane berry make it easy to find the right variety to grow in your climate and it's easy to find a patch of blackberries while you're out hiking.

Cranberries

More than just a side dish for Thanksgiving, cranberries have been long touted for their help with preventing bladder infections. The claims aren't unfounded. The cranberry has been shown to have amazing antibacterial qualities. By preventing bacteria from being able to adhere to the walls of the urinary tract, the phytochemicals in cranberries do indeed prevent infection. In a similar manner, they also help fight the bacteria responsible for periodontal disease. Cranberries are not convenient to grow in most gardens, but are usually on sale in the fall and will keep in the freezer quite well.

Currants

While probably not easily found in your local grocery store, if you can find currant shrubs (black is most common) to grow in your backyard, they are definitely worth the space. Among other nutritional properties, currants have two times the potassium content as bananas and are packed full of B vitamins. Currants contain a variety of phytochemicals that act as anti-inflammatories to reduce pain in a similar manner to ibuprofen, and also act on the factors that contribute to cardiovascular and neurological disease. Currants can be bitter so they are rarely eaten raw and are instead used to make juices or preserves.

The health benefits and flavors of delicious seasonal berries can't be matched. The next time you serve up a dish of berry cobbler or strawberry shortcake at a get-together, remember to go heavy on the berries.

Tammie Painter guards her herbs and other favorite plants from the slugs in her Milwaukie, Oregon, garden. She wins, most of the time.

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[The Recipes]

Blackberry Cobbler

Any summer berry (or a combination of berries) works for this easy dessert. SERVES 4 to 6

½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
4 cups fresh or frozen blackberries, partially thawed
1 teaspoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup whole wheat flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons butter
½ cup buttermilk
1 to 2 tablespoons milk, as needed
1 tablespoon brown sugar
Vanilla ice cream
Mint sprigs, for garnish

1 Combine sugar and cornstarch in a heavy saucepan. Stir in blackberries and next 4 ingredients; bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Pour into an 8-inch-square baking dish.
2 Pulse all-purpose flour and next 4 ingredients in a food processor 3 or 4 times or until combined. Add butter, and pulse 5 or 6 times. With processor running, gradually add buttermilk; process just until blended. Add milk, if necessary, to make dough moist, but not wet.
3 Drop batter by heaping tablespoons onto the berry mixture (about 9 dollops). Sprinkle cobbler with brown sugar.
4 Bake at 400 degrees for 25 minutes or until the cobbler is golden-brown. Serve warm with ice cream and garnish with mint sprigs.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Find a visual guide to this article with images of each plant at *www.herbcompanion.com/healthfulberries*.

Cranberry Sauce

You won't ever touch the canned stuff again once you see how easy and tasty this recipe is. Make this the day before serving to give it time to chill and set. MAKES 5 CUPS

2 cups water
2 cups sugar
4 cups cranberries (1-pound package)
Optional additions:
1 tablespoon grated orange zest
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
1 teaspoon almond extract

1 Bring water and sugar to a boil for 3 minutes.
2 Add cranberries and return to boil. Boil until berries pop, about 5 minutes.
3 Mix in your choice of additions and stir well. Transfer to serving bowl and refrigerate until completely cool. Serve the following day.

Berry Freezer Jam

You can use three cups of any berries, but the combination of blueberries, blackberries and strawberries makes a unique jam. MAKES 7 CUPS

1 pint blueberries
1 pint blackberries
1 pint strawberries
5 cups sugar (no substitutes, do not decrease)
1 box pectin
1 cup water

1 Puree berries in a blender or food processor, leaving a few chunks for texture. Strain through cheesecloth to remove seeds, if desired.
2 Measure 3 cups of the blended berries and combine in a large bowl with the sugar. Mix well and let sit 10 to 15 minutes.
3 In a saucepan, bring pectin and water to a boil for 1 minute, stirring continuously.
4 Pour pectin water into berry mix and stir until sugar dissolves—2 to 5 minutes.
5 Pour into clean jelly jars that hold no more than 1 cup, leaving half an inch of space at top; cover.
6 Allow to sit at room temperature for 24 hours, then freeze for storage or keep in the refrigerator.

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Seed Storage Guide

By Barbara Pleasant

Wind down your summer with these seed care and storage tips, and enjoy an organized (and fruitful) spring planting season.

One of the best ways to escape end-of-summer sadness is to let your thoughts wander into next year's garden. Imagine your winter-frozen soil thawed into glistening loam where robins pluck up earthworms. Then put yourself in the picture, poking fat pea seeds into the ground, or patting compost over a newly sown bed of lettuce.

Save yourself time and headache by putting your seeds in order before forgetting about them over the winter. No doubt they will rest well enough; after all, seeds are plants enjoying their ultimate state of dormancy. Just make sure they're in a comfortable place, protected from heat, humidity and strong light. Take the first step toward actualizing your garden fantasies by tending to the needs of sleeping beans or tiny onion seeds.

Sorting Your Seeds

Begin by setting aside seeds you collected over the summer, which are probably floating around in a multitude of paper or plastic bags (we'll get to those in a minute). Then divide the rest into categories that reflect each plant's place in the garden. For example, you might start with three piles—veggies, herbs and flowers—and then divide each of those piles into cool-season and warm-season groups. As you sort, look at the packets and check them for dates. Toss seeds that are too old to germinate well, or those that you tried and didn't like. Use the"How Long Will Seeds Keep?" list on Page 44 to take some of the confusion out of this step.

If you have a lot of seeds, you might want to further sort them into plant groups, such as beans, salad crops or cucurbits (members of the cucumber family). The main thing is to come up with a plan that suits your garden. Next, make lists of what's in each pile so you won't have to dig through your collection before you put together a seed order or get ready to plant (big index cards are great for this). Once you make your lists, use rubber bands to keep seed packets together by category. I keep these lists—along with recent seed order invoices—in a file folder taped to the lid of my storage box.

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Seed Storage Strategies

Seeds store best when they are kept cool, dry and dark. Address the dryness issue first by finding an airtight container that will protect your seeds from changes in humidity. Glass jars with tight-fitting lids work well, or you can use a plastic storage bin with a tight-fitting, snap-on lid. Or, do both! After enduring years of disarray, I found that a plastic storage bin outfitted with homemade cardboard partitions is perfect for my needs. The partitions keep veggie, herb and flower seeds separate, plus there's a fourth section for supplies. (See "Seven Seed Box Tips.")

Carole B. Turner, author of *Seed Sowing and Saving* (Storey, 1998), emphasizes that seeds, being very much alive, do best when storage conditions are consistent. Fluctuations in temperature and moisture can cause the resting embryos inside the seeds to start growing and then stop again; with each surge and lull, the embryo may use up stored food meant to support germination.

The best place in my house to keep seeds is the basement, where winter temperatures hover around 60 degrees and summer temperatures rarely go above 75 degrees. To decide if your basement or another room will work to store seeds, consider the temperature and humidity levels. Combined, they should not equal more than 100. For example, since my storage temperatures are moderate (60 degrees to 75 degrees) I should try to keep humidity low (40 percent to 25 percent): 60-degree temperature plus 40 percent humidity equals 100.

If I open the seed box often in damp weather, I place a container of silica gel (sold as closet dehumidifiers at department stores) in the box for a day or two.

If you can't avoid fluctuating temperature or humidity levels at home, consider storing your seed box where you work, if it is air-conditioned. Or you can refrigerate or freeze your seeds in airtight containers. Just be sure seeds are thoroughly dry before you freeze them; seeds that are not completely dry or have been exposed to high humidity levels can expand and burst when placed in a freezer. In humid summer weather, place seeds you plan to freeze in an airtight container with a packet of silica gel for two days before you freeze them. In winter, air-drying seeds for a day or two before freezing them is usually sufficient.

Some people freeze all of their seeds, but unless you need to extend their normal lifespan, this may be a waste of energy. If you do refrigerate or freeze your seeds, be sure to allow the containers to reach room temperature before you open them. This keeps condensation (which the dry seeds will absorb as excess moisture) from forming inside the containers.

Cleaning Home-Grown Seeds

When I tidy up my seed box, I always encounter crumpled paper bags containing garden seeds I've saved that need cleaning.

You can buy framed seed-sifting screens that have holes of various shapes and diameters, or you can try my homemade version that consists of embroidery hoops—purchased at a thrift store for 50 cents each—

Seven Seed Box Tips

Gather up your seeds and get organized by using a storage box big enough to house your entire collection. Then consider these ideas and interior features:

- Install partitions, or use separate small boxes for various types.
- Sort packets into categories, and keep like seeds together with rubber bands.
- Make color-coded paper packets from envelopes; use one color for veggies, another for flowers and a third option for herbs.
- Embroidery hoops outfitted with cloth netting make seed cleaning fast and easy.
- Store bulky seeds in small glass jars or pill bottles (baby food jars work great).
- Packets of silica gel can serve as drying agents.
- Make a written inventory of what you have, then stash your records in an envelope attached to lid.

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Should an enterprising mouse enjoy a snack of the heirloom mahogany marigold seeds passed down from your great-grandmother, no amount of money could replace them.

How Long Will Seeds Keep?

When stored in a cool, dark place with constant low humidity, vegetable seeds typically remain viable for one to 10 years, depending on the species. Freezing can triple the storage potential of most seeds, but this list reflects average seed longevity under good but non-frozen conditions.

1 to 2 YEARS

- corn
- leeks
- okra
- onions
- parsley
- peppers

3 to 4 YEARS

- beans
- beets
- carrots
- chard
- lettuce
- peas
- spinach
- squash

4 YEARS OR MORE

- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- cabbage
- cantaloupe
- cauliflower
- celery
- Chinese cabbage
- cucumber
- eggplant
- kale
- kohlrabi
- pumpkin
- radish
- tomato
- turnip
- watermelon

and several pieces of nylon net and tulle, which you can get at a fabric shop for less than a dollar. Stackable, washable and easy to store right in my seed box, the hoop screens make it possible to separate seeds from chaff quickly by placing a coarse, 1/4-inch mesh nylon screen over a finer screen outfitted with 1/8-inch tulle. To accommodate small or oddly shaped seeds, it's easy to double up with either fabric.

Next comes a crucial task—sorting through the collected seeds to remove the small and the weak. Just as pulling up slow or spindly seedlings while thinning a row favors the most vigorous plants, a second round of selection for the most robust seeds can make a huge difference in the quality of the next season's crop. With large seeds you can do this visually, by picking out any seeds that are small, discolored or broken. But with smaller seeds, you will get faster results by placing them in a clear drinking glass or jar with a half-cup or so of water. Swirl the seeds and water for 30 seconds, then pour off the excess water along with any floaters—weak seeds will float because of poorly filled embryos or damage from feeding insects. Dump the heavy seeds from the bottom of the glass onto a drying screen, paper towel or, in the case of seeds that develop a sticky coating when wet (as most mustard family plants do), a baking pan with a nonstick coating. Let the seeds dry for a day or two before packing them up and storing them in paper envelopes, pill bottles or airtight glass jars. Label and date each seed container.

When to Grow from Seed

Since the birth of the transplant business in the 1970s, planting seedlings has become commonplace. There is even some horticultural research to support that approach.

Certainly there are risks involved. Transplanting can injure or traumatize roots, and plants that throw down delicate taproots as soon as they sprout (carrots and dill, for example) are difficult to handle as seedlings. With eager-beaver seedlings such as beans, squash and corn, messing with seedlings is worthwhile only if you're growing a tightly managed intensive garden. It just makes sense to bypass containers, potting mix, grow lights and damping off worries by waiting for the right time to sow fast-growing peas, beans and beets, and difficult transplanters, such as dill and carrots, right in the garden.

With tomatoes, peppers and other slow-growing crops you do want to plant out as seedlings, there is a strong case for growing your own. You will have a huge selection of varieties to choose from, you'll save lots of money, and you won't be disappointed with poor performance from stressed-out seedlings that have been sitting on shelves weeks after they should have been put into the ground. You will enjoy the late-winter companionship of your seedlings, and you'll escape the mass-market plants raised on chemical diets in fumigated greenhouses. Besides, growing your own seedlings is just plain fun.

Garden expert Barbara Pleasant writes and gardens in Virginia. Reprinted with permission from Mother Earth News.

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Grow Healthful Flax Seed

BY RITA BUCHANAN

For beauty, nutrition and flavor, this tenacious plant is hard to beat.

Flax
Linum usitatissimum

Used for fiber and seed production

Hardy to Zone 4

The life of a flax flower is transitory: a flower lasts less than one day. But each plant makes dozens of flowers for three to four weeks, and a plot of flax in bloom looks like a reflection of the sky. Then seedpods swell to the size of a pea and turn from green to gold as the seeds inside ripen, and the plants dry out and die.

The species of flax grown for fiber and seed production is an annual called *Linum usitatissimum*; that's Latin for "the most useful kind of flax." Flax is almost always grown like a grain crop, in plots of many plants crowded close together. Each individual plant makes one or more slender, erect stems about 3 feet tall, scattered with narrow, pale green leaves about 1 inch long. The stems branch near the top to bear blue or white round, 1/2-inch-wide flowers with five petals.

Different cultivars of flax have been selected for maximum yield and quality of either fiber or oil. Farmers specialize in one product or the other, choose cultivars accordingly, and take slightly different approaches to growing and harvesting their crops. On a backyard scale, it isn't necessary to specialize. From a flax patch about 4 feet square, you can harvest enough fiber to make a basket and enough seeds for a batch of bread or crackers.

Grow and Harvest Flax

Flax tolerates a range of soils and climates and can be grown in almost any part of the United States. Choose a site in full sun, with deep, fertile, well-drained soil, and prepare it as you would for growing vegetables or flowers. Flax grows best in cool weather, so sow it outdoors as soon as you can work the soil in spring, at the same time that you would sow peas, lettuce or other cool-weather crops. This can be as early as January or as late as May, depending on where you live.

Rake the surface of the soil to prepare a smooth, fine-textured seedbed. Measure your planned flax plot to determine its area, and plan to sow about one tablespoon of flax seeds per 10 square feet. Dust the small brown seeds with flour before sowing so that you can scatter them evenly across the surface of the plot. Then use a rake to draw the seeds down into the soil, covering

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After blooming, the seed pods swell and turn brown.

Petals unfold in the morning and drop by evening.

Flax seed has beneficial omega-3 fatty acids.

them 1/4- to 1/2-inch-deep. Water gently if the soil starts to dry out before germination, which takes about 10 days.

Seedling flax plants quickly develop a good root system and need watering only if the weather is unusually warm, dry or windy. Pull out any weeds that appear before the seedlings have grown a few inches tall; after the seeds sprout, the flax plants will crowd out any weeds. Rabbits and rodents sometimes nibble flax, but it has few insect or disease problems. The only common, serious crisis in growing flax is that the tender stalks sometimes get knocked flat by hail or heavy rainstorms. If that happens, use the tines of a garden fork. They may straighten up again, or at least partially recover.

The fibers in the stem of the flax plant form a thin layer between the woody core and the outer skin or epidermis that runs all the way from the roots to the tips. The fibers have already reached their full length when the flax begins to flower, about two months after planting, but they are still thin, delicate and weak. From flowering until the death of the plant, the fibers become increasingly thicker and stronger, but also more stiff and brittle. Unfortunately, fiber quality peaks before the seeds have fully ripened. If you harvest the plants early enough (usually about three months after planting) to get top-quality fiber, you sacrifice most of the seed crop. If you wait until the seeds are ripe (about four months after planting), the fiber has become coarse. This difference in the timing of harvest is a major reason why commercial flax farmers produce either fiber or seeds but not both. Again, a hobby grower can compromise. The fiber from mature plants is too coarse for weaving fine fabrics, but it's acceptable for making baskets or other simple craft projects.

To reap both seeds and fiber, harvest the flax about four months after planting. The leaves on the lower half or two-thirds of the stem will be turning yellow and dropping off. Most of the seedpods will have turned gold or tan; if you shake them, the seeds will rattle inside. Grasp the stems, a handful at a time, right at ground level and pull them up, roots and all. Shake the soil off the roots, lay a few handfuls of stems together side by side, and use rubber bands or string to secure them into a bundle.

Thresh Flax Seeds

Hang the bundles in a warm place with good air circulation. After a few weeks, when the stalks are stiff and dry, you can thresh out the seeds. This takes some effort: you have to crush open the pods. One method is to slide a pillowcase over the top end of a bundle, tie the case securely around the stems, then put it down on a paved driveway, sidewalk or other hard, flat surface. Beat the pods through the cloth with a block of wood, roll them with a rolling pin (push hard!), jump on the bag or drive back and forth over it with a car.

After several minutes of such activity, open the bag to confirm that most of the pods have been crushed, shake the bundle vigorously to knock out all the seeds, then pour the seeds and chaff out of the pillowcase into a bowl and start again with the next bundle. After threshing all the bundles, sift the seeds through a colander or coarse strainer to remove bits of stems and broken pods. Step outdoors in the breeze and pour the seeds slowly from one container to another to winnow away any remaining chaff or dust.

Process Flax Fibers

Processing the bundles of stems to extract the fibers for spinning is a complex task that requires simple but special tools, a lot of hard physical work, and a sense of timing and judgment that comes only from long experience. The first step, called retting, involves soaking or wetting the stems for a period of days or weeks to promote bacterial action, which separates the different layers of stem tissues and loosens the fibers. After retting, the stems are dried again, then crushed between the wooden blades of a tool called a break or brake, which breaks the woody core into short bits that fall away from the mass of fibers. Finally, the bundles are combed through metal-tined combs called hackles. The result: a smooth bundle of long, straight fibers called line flax and a pile of fluffy, tangled, shorter fibers called tow. The line flax is used to make crisp, glossy fabrics, and the tow is used for everyday goods.

Rita Buchanan is the author of A Dyer's Garden *(Interweave Press, 1995).*

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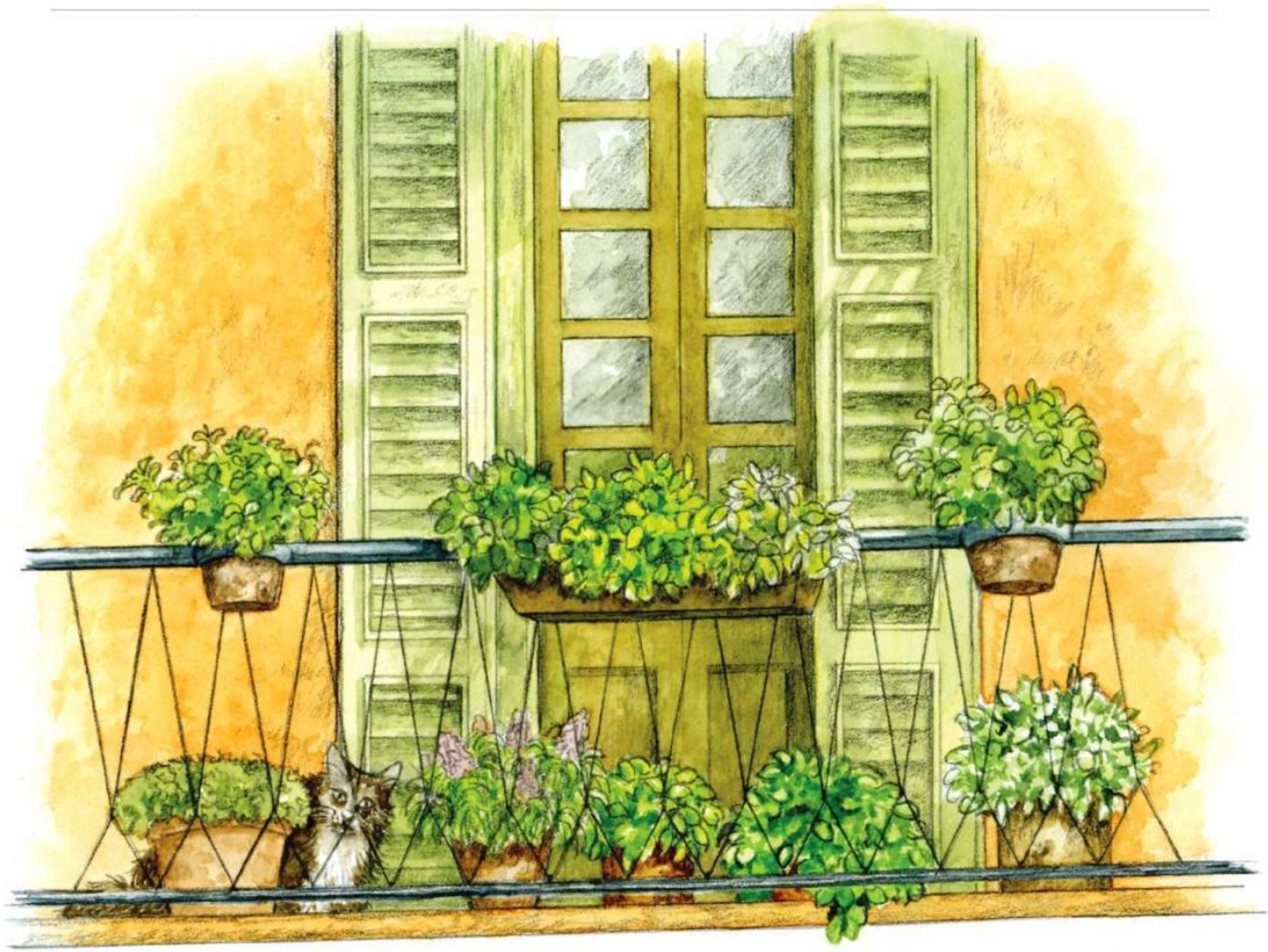

Bite-Sized Botany

BY KATHLEEN HALLORAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD

Create a useful, beautiful terrace garden with 10 types of mint.

One good herb leads to another. Many herb gardeners are plant collectors, and it's hard to imagine any group of herbs that lends itself better to this collective spirit than the mints. The range of familiar fragrances from unexpected sources is eye-popping and smile-inducing. Chocolate! Lemon! Pineapple! More!

Perfect for Containers

The *Mentha* genus is especially good for collecting in containers on a balcony or porch, even for those with acres of gardens, because many if not most varieties in the mint family are too aggressive in the ground, even invasive, sending out runners in all directions. And it makes sense to keep them close by in pots because the mints are so handy in the kitchen and easy to use for instant garnishes and to add a zing of flavor to fruit salads and other everyday food.

And fortunately for us herb collectors, there are lots of mints to choose from—25 species in the *Mentha* genus, as well as hybrids and varieties aplenty.

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Even with a small balcony garden, you can collect many mints.

You might start off with basics, including a useful spearmint such as 'Kentucky Colonel' for mojitos, juleps and minted peas; a peppermint or two for stomach-soothing teas; and those fruity mints with the astonishing scents. There are many beyond the 10 discussed here, including lime mint, ginger mint and banana mint. Before you know it, you'll be looking for the more difficult-to-find species and the newest cultivars.

Growing Mints

You can always recognize a member of the mint family, Labiatae (which includes many other common classic culinary herbs such as basil, sage and oregano) from its square stems. Most mints thrive in light shade in cool, moist conditions with good drainage. They are very easy to grow, even in less-than-ideal conditions, and most are hardy perennials. Growing them in pots that are conveniently close by lets the gardener assert more control, and the constant harvesting keeps them shapely and growing.

Cutting them back regularly also has the advantage of preventing or delaying flowering; they are grown for their leaves, which are generally more fragrant before flowering. When they flower and set seeds, they might not produce plants with the same intense flavor you get from the originals, and some mints set sterile seed that won't germinate. For that reason, the mints are best started vegetatively—from cuttings, division or transplants—rather than from seed.

Fortunately, they root easily. Take a cutting about 4 inches long from the tip of a growing stem, remove the lower leaves, dip the stem into a rooting hormone and give it a shake, then pop it into a small pot (with a drainage hole) filled with decent potting mix. Before you know it, you've got another one that's a clone of the original.

If you're shopping for mints in a garden center, don't be afraid to rub a small leaf and then sniff it. Fragrance and flavor are so closely linked that one is a good indicator of the other.

Keep a cutting or new transplant uniformly moist until it settles in and starts

Plant Key

1. Pennyroyal (*M. pulegium*)
2. Spearmint (*M. spicata* 'Kentucky Colonel')
3. Grapefruit mint (*M. ×piperita* 'Grapefruit')
4. Chocolate peppermint (*M. ×piperita* 'Chocolate')
5. Apple mint (*M. ×villosa*)
6. Corsican mint (*M. requienii*)
7. Lemon mint (*M. ×piperita* 'Hillary's Sweet Lemon')
8. Water mint (*M. aquatica*)
9. Orange mint (*M. ×piperita* 'Orange' or 'Citrata')
10. Pineapple mint (*M. suaveolens* 'Variegata')

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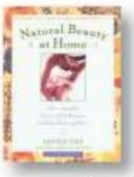

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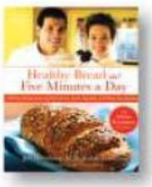

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growing. If it's putting out new leaves, you know it's also growing new roots. Then you can back off a bit on the watering, but in a pot it's going to want daily monitoring, particularly in warm, dry summers. Gradually pot it into bigger and bigger containers (for the mints, I generally go for wider, shallower pots rather than tall ones) until it reaches the biggest-sized container you're willing to give it. After that, you can repot it occasionally to do some root pruning and give it fresh potting soil to maintain it at that size. It should need little fertilizer and have few pests.

Using Mints

When you think of all the ways that mints have worked their way into history, you get an idea of the range of its usefulness. Ethnic cuisines all over the world, from Middle Eastern to Mexican, incorporate mints into traditional recipes. The list of beverages in which mints play a central role is long, from simple teas to that instantly recognizable, bright green crème de menthe of grasshopper fame. We expect menthol flavor and fragrance in gum, toothpaste, mouthwash, shampoo and cosmetics. We get the sharp mint flavor in jellies, candies and desserts.

While you're probably not interested in flavoring your own toothpaste, you'll find plenty of other ways to use your mints, which can even liven up a jug of water in the fridge. Mint is used in aromatherapy, and dried mint leaves can be added to potpourris. They have also been used traditionally to repel insect pests in the home and garden.

Mint is often dried for teas, sometimes frozen for use in recipes, but most agree that the flavor and fragrance are best used fresh.

10 Mints for Your Balcony Garden

Peppermint (*M.* ×*piperita*). Many varieties available. 'Chocolate', with its dark stems and slight but distinct chocolate aroma, is a favorite and is easy to find at garden centers; another to try is 'Lime'.

Orange mint (*M.* ×*piperita* 'Orange' or 'Citrata'). A refreshing peppermint hybrid that goes by a number of different names. Attractive and fast-growing, often with a purplish tinge to the new growth.

Grapefruit mint (*M.* ×*piperita* 'Grapefruit'). This bushy herb has a strong grapefruit flavor. One of the best in terms of fragrance and flavor and is not as aggressive as most.

Lemon mint (*M.* ×*piperita* 'Hillary's Sweet Lemon'). Mint hybrid with a sweet spearmint scent with a hint of citrus. Named for Hillary Clinton.

Spearmint (*M. spicata*). Spearmint is considered the best for culinary use. Try 'Kentucky Colonel' for its large, ruffled leaves and clean flavor, or 'Crispa'. 'Nana' is a cultivar used in Moroccan cooking.

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Apple mint (*M.* ×*villosa*), also called woolly apple mint. Vigorous, upright grower, attractive light green leaves that are softly fuzzy. Excellent flavor.

Pennyroyal (*M. pulegium*) Keep this one separate from the others, because despite its strong, minty fragrance, it has been shown to be toxic in large quantities. Enjoy its scent, not its flavor. It is a bit more susceptible to frost than most.

Pineapple mint (*M. suaveolens* 'Variegata'). This is a handsome plant with its variegated leaves, splashed with cream blotches, and sweet scent.

Corsican mint (*M. requienii*). This herb provides the original flavoring in crème de menthe. Low-growing with tiny leaves, forming mats, and is sometimes grown between paving stones in a walkway, but can be difficult to grow in too-wet or too-dry conditions.

Water mint (*M. aquatica*). This one is difficult to find in the nursery trade, but worth the challenge of cultivating because it is often crossed with spearmint and is a parent of peppermint and some of the interesting fruit-scented hybrids. Likes wet conditions.

Kathleen Halloran is a contributing editor living in beautiful Austin, Texas.

Additional Reading

For more about mints, see *Mints: A Family of Herbs and Ornamentals* (Timber Press, 2002) by Barbara Lawton.

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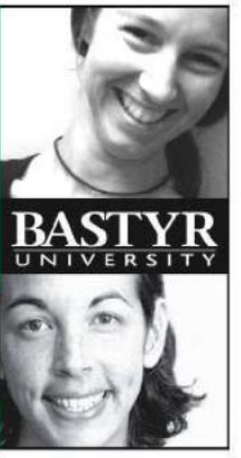

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Circle #2; see card pg 51

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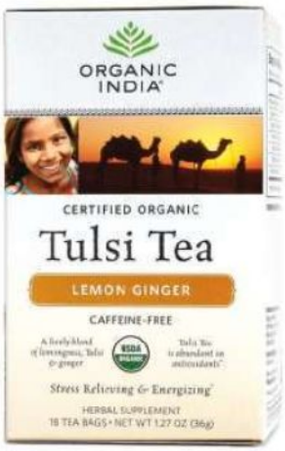
Host a Tea Party: 12 Products

Enjoy these organic teas with our favorite tea ware and delicious add-ins.

Tea-For-One teapot by **Andrea by Sadek**, $25
We love the charming poppy field pattern of this teapot-cup-saucer combo, designed by Vera Bradley. *www.sadek.com*

Glass teacups by **Numi Organic Tea**, $15.99
Sip tea in these double-walled teacups, which are designed to keep hot tea hot. *www.numitea.com*



Tulsi tea by **Organic India**, $4.99
Antioxidant-rich tulsi, also known as sacred basil, is used to boost immunity. Stock up on this tea during cold and flu season. *www.organicindia.com*

Tea cylinders by **Two Leaves and a Bud**, $9.95
We love these loose-leaf flavored teas, especially the smooth-tasting White Peony. *www.twoleavesandabud.com*

Yerba Maté Royale loose tea by **Wisdom of the Ancients**, $8.99
This blend has organic maté, known for its stimulant properties, and the natural sweetener stevia. *www.wisdomofancients.com*

Whole Leaf Organics tea by **Choice Organic Teas**, $6.49
We enjoyed the classic Estate Blend Darjeeling and the delightful Sweet Liquorice Mint varieties, as well as the biodegradeable tea bags. *www.choiceorganicteas.com*

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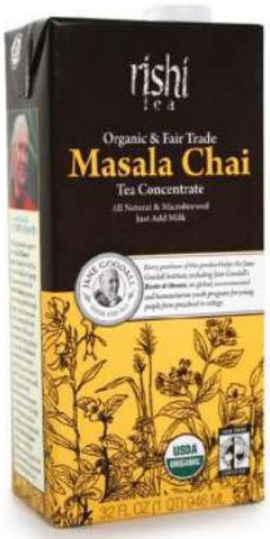
Happi Tea by **Oregon's Wild Harvest**, $9.99
Reduce stress with this tasty combination of chamomile, holy basil, passionflower, catnip, valerian, skullcap and lemon balm. *www.oregonswildharvest.com*

Masala Chai Concentrate by **Rishi Tea**, $6.99
Simply add milk to enjoy this spicy fair-trade chai, which is flavored with cinnamon, cardamom and ginger. *www.rishi-tea.com*



Tea Traveler by **Teas Etc.**, $19.95
The tea enthusiast on the go can now brew their favorite tea in this three-piece, BPA-free travel mug. Set includes a mug, an infuser and a lid. *www.teasetc.com*

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Better Tea in 3, 2, 1 ...

Tea enhancers by **Catalyst Gourmet**, $6.50
Add chai, ginger, fennel or saffron enhancers to your tea. You can also flavor coffee, oatmeal, yogurt and much more. *www.catalysttea.com*

Tea-infused chocolate drops by **The Tea Room**, $8.54
Inspire tired tea with these drops, available in eight flavors. We like the Bedouin's Mint drops and the Green Earl Grey. *www.thetearoom.biz*

Honey sticks by **Stash Tea**, $4.95
Sweeten your tea with pure clover honey by stirring these straws in your cup. Flavors include original, chai, cinnamon and lemon. *www.stashtea.com*

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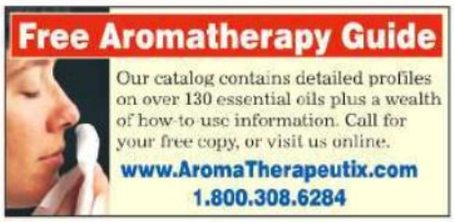

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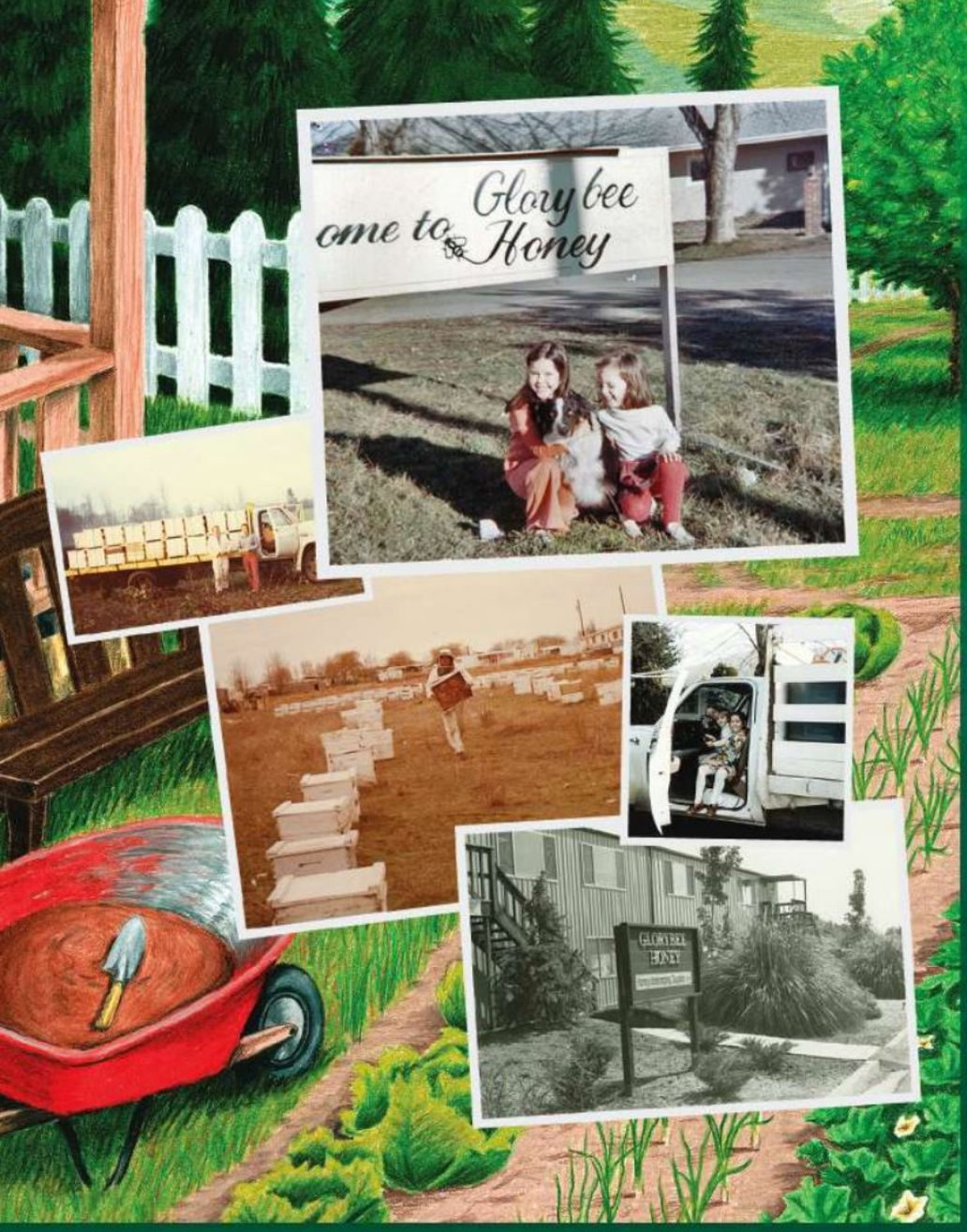

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